



OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



JANUARY 1, 2023–MARCH 31, 2023

On the cover: The February earthquakes damaged a mosque in Aleppo, Syria, a city already ravaged by conflict.
(World Food Programme photo)



We are pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This report discharges our quarterly reporting responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

The United States launched OIR in 2014 to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), while setting the conditions for follow-on activities to increase regional stability. The U.S. Government strategy to defeat ISIS includes military operations, as well as support for local security forces, diplomacy, governance, humanitarian assistance, and stabilization programs.

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OIR as well as the work of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to further the U.S. Government's policy goals in Iraq and Syria during the period of January 1 through March 31, 2023. This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies—the DoD, State, and USAID OIGs—and our partner oversight agencies.

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A Norwegian Soldier deploys a smoke grenade during a CJTF-OIR operational rehearsal exercise at Al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

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A Coalition force member fires a 120mm illumination mortar round during a live-fire exercise in northeastern Syria. (Army Reserve photo)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) mission is to advise, assist, and enable partner forces until they can independently ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS in designated areas of Iraq and Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks in Iraq and a secure and stable situation in northeastern Syria.¹ The broader counter-ISIS campaign includes supporting the Iraqi government and local Syrian partners with civilian-led stabilization activities.²

ISIS capabilities remained “degraded” due to Coalition-assisted counterterrorism pressure, but the group continued to pose a threat.³ With depleting membership and cash reserves, ISIS emphasized fundraising through donations, intimidation, extortion, looting, and kidnapping for ransom, as well as laundering money.⁴ ISIS conducted attacks at a low level and operational pace—mostly small-arms and IED attacks and ambushes—but the group still aspired to conduct larger attacks.⁵ In Syria, attacks targeted the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and government forces, and media and observer reporting attributed the killing of dozens of civilian truffle foragers to ISIS.⁶ ISIS also remained intent on freeing its fighters from SDF detention facilities and indoctrinating, intimidating, and recruiting residents of the al-Hol displaced persons camp.⁷

Rival forces operating in Syria conducted increasingly provocative activities against Coalition and U.S. forces.⁸ Iran-aligned militias escalated hostilities towards U.S. and Coalition forces in Syria during the quarter, including unmanned aerial system (UAS) attacks in March that killed one U.S. contractor and wounded 25 U.S. personnel, prompting U.S. defensive action.⁹ Russian violations of deconfliction protocols with the U.S. military increased to significantly higher levels in March compared to January and February, with near-daily Russian military flights over U.S. bases, particularly in the vicinity of the At Tanf Garrison.¹⁰ Tensions also remained high between Turkish-backed forces and the SDF, which continued to prepare for a possible and destabilizing Turkish military ground invasion into northern Syria, though the immediate threat of a ground incursion appeared to diminish following the February earthquakes.¹¹

Partner forces in Syria continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations, with Coalition support. Coalition forces conducted joint helicopter raids with the SDF, including one in which a senior ISIS leader was killed, and four U.S. forces personnel and a working dog were wounded in an explosion at the site.¹² The SDF, with Coalition support, conducted multi-day broad area clearance operations, resulting in the detention of more than 170 ISIS fighters.¹³ Coalition forces continued to train the SDF and affiliated security forces to enhance security at detention facilities holding ISIS fighters and at the al-Hol camp.¹⁴ Coalition forces also continued to train the Syrian Free Army (SFA), which operates in the deconfliction zone around the At Tanf Garrison.¹⁵

Lead IG Oversight Activities

Lead IG and partner agencies completed two reports related to OIR during the quarter, one on the DoD's handling of Service members who experienced a traumatic brain injury and the other on the Army's management of prepositioned equipment, including equipment that supports OIR. As of March 31, 2023, 13 projects related to OIR were ongoing.

During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in one conviction for bribery and kickbacks. Investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 25 investigations, initiated 7 investigations, and coordinated on 57 open investigations. The investigations involve a variety of alleged crimes, including procurement fraud, corruption, grant fraud, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. During the quarter, the DoD OIG Hotline investigator referred 59 cases to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.

ISIS remained active in the al-Hol camp for displaced persons, but the level of violence declined.

¹⁶ While security in the camp increased due to enhanced security force training, security investments, and an SDF clearance operation in 2022, ISIS continued to pose a potential threat in al-Hol, including by targeting children for recruitment.¹⁷ No ISIS-related killings were reported.¹⁸ USAID, State, and the DoD coordinated to support humanitarian operations and improve security in the camp.¹⁹ The U.S. Government maintained that repatriation and reintegration of al-Hol residents to their home communities is “the only practical long term solution.”²⁰ During the quarter, more than 1,300 individuals were repatriated from al-Hol, 1,161 of whom were Iraqis.²¹

The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) launched two new operations against ISIS that involved holding cleared territory, but continued to depend on Coalition ISR.

The ISF conducted Operation Righteous Saber I and II, holding territory cleared of ISIS fighters.²² However, the ISF continued to rely on the Coalition for ISR and other capabilities, and needs to improve intelligence-sharing.²³ To improve the capabilities of ISF artillery units, Coalition advisors began a train-the-trainer program.²⁴ The Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) continued reforms aimed at creating one unified force, but a spike in tensions between the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's (IKR) two main political parties over the assassination of a former Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) official threatened to undermine unification.²⁵

USAID and State redirected existing humanitarian assistance programs to respond to earthquakes in Türkiye and northwestern Syria.

²⁶ The United States announced more than \$100 million for earthquake response activities in Syria.²⁷ The earthquakes' impact on U.S. military and stabilization operations was limited, as those activities occur in the northeastern part of the country, which was not as severely impacted.²⁸ Separately, in Iraq, the international community continued to transfer humanitarian response operations to Iraqi and Kurdish authorities.²⁹ However, while Iraqi and Kurdish authorities are increasingly able to manage and fund these activities, they remain unable to do so in some areas of priority need, including displaced persons camps.³⁰

ISIS remained active in the al-Hol camp for displaced persons, but the level of violence declined.







An SDF member leaps over a bonfire during Nowruz, a Kurdish celebration of the new year. (U.S. Army Reserve)

MISSION UPDATE

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MISSION UPDATE

Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) is a U.S.-led mission implemented by the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to advise, assist, and enable local Iraqi and vetted Syrian security forces until they can independently defeat ISIS in designated areas of Iraq and Syria.³¹ The mission seeks to set the conditions for a long-term security cooperation framework in Iraq and a secure and stable situation in northeastern Syria.³² The mission is executed by the Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which comprises 25 troop-contributing Coalition countries. CJTF-OIR works with the Iraqi government and vetted partner forces in both countries.³³

In its 2022 Campaign Plan, CJTF-OIR outlined desired end states for OIR and the ways and means to achieve those end states. While the end states are classified, CJTF-OIR said that generally, the end states include: 1) ISIS is territorially defeated and unable to threaten regional security and Coalition homelands; and 2) areas liberated from ISIS in Iraq and Syria are stabilized such that the Iraqi government and appropriate authorities in Syria are able to prevent an ISIS resurgence.³⁴

In addition to the desired end states, the OIR campaign supports the U.S. Government's wider security and stabilization objectives in the region.³⁵ In Iraq, the U.S. Government promotes a strong democracy, inclusive economic growth, independence from malign

A U.S. Army Soldier provides security during a night patrol at Al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)



CJTF-OIR reported that sustained counterterrorism pressure has led to reduced ISIS activity in Iraq and Syria.

influence, a resilient Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), and continued Iraqi cooperation with regional neighbors to enhance security, critical infrastructure, and economic development.³⁶ In Syria, the U.S. Government seeks to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, advance a durable political solution to the Syrian conflict, support humanitarian access, preserve ceasefires, and promote justice and accountability.³⁷

CJTF-OIR reported that while OIR’s strategic objectives and main lines of effort remain unchanged, a review of the 2022 Campaign Plan found that some modifications of the Campaign Plan were necessary to reflect changes in the operational environment in Iraq and Syria and to better enable the delivery and assessment of the operations, actions, and investments needed to meet the campaign objectives.³⁸

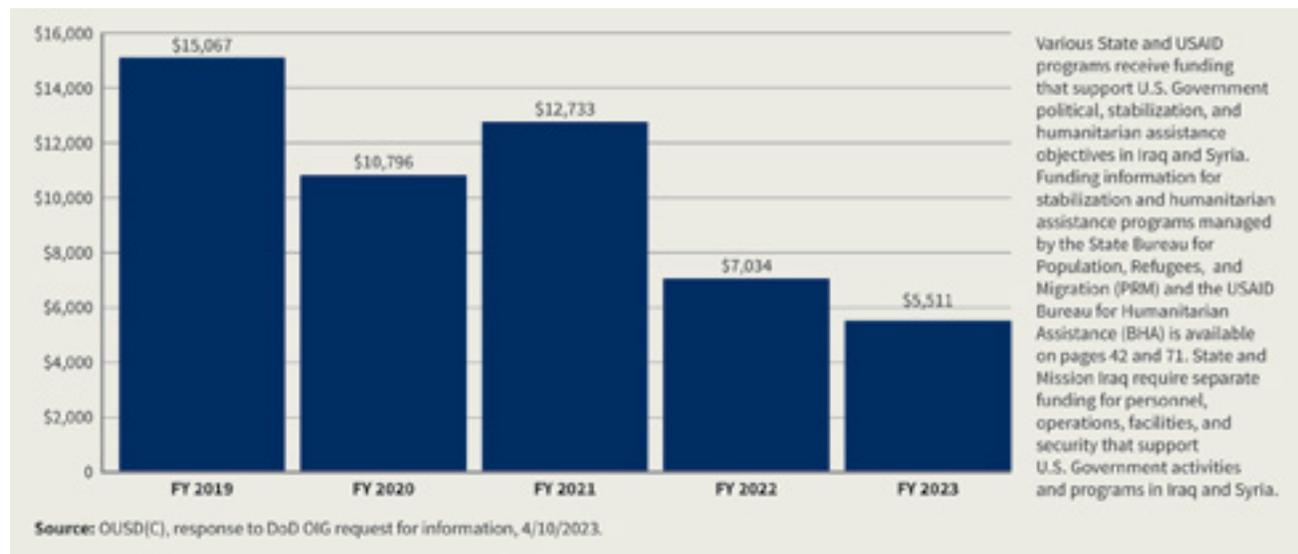
CJTF-OIR reported that sustained counterterrorism pressure has led to reduced ISIS activity in Iraq and Syria. ISIS does not control any territory and remains incapable of mounting large, complex attacks against regional populations.³⁹ However, as General Michael “Erik” Kurilla, Commander of the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), outlined to Congress in March, ISIS remains a threat.⁴⁰

While there has been steady progress toward creating a secure environment, areas of Iraq and Syria liberated from ISIS are not yet stabilized. More than 1 million Iraqis and Syrians remain displaced, and their home communities continue to experience the effects of conflict, disease, and inadequate or non-existent public services.⁴¹ In both countries, partner forces continued to demonstrate increasing, if incremental, gains in their ability to defeat ISIS independently but remained reliant on Coalition support in some areas.⁴²

Details on progress and challenges related to specific DoD, State, and USAID objectives are provided throughout this report.

Figure 1.

DoD Enacted Funding for OIR FY 2019-FY 2023, in \$ Millions



“If we were to leave Syria and if the SDF could not fight ISIS by themselves, you could see a break out of the prisons. You could see the radicalization in al-Hol. And it is our estimate that ISIS would return in 1 to 2 years.” —USCENTCOM Commander General Michael “Erik” Kurilla

STATUS OF ISIS

USCENTCOM assessed that due to Coalition-assisted counterterrorism pressure, ISIS’s capability in Iraq and Syria remains “degraded.” However, ISIS continues to pose a threat. The group’s violent ideology remains “uncontained and unconstrained” and ISIS “retains the ability to inspire, direct, organize and lead attacks in the region and abroad.” In particular, ISIS seeks to free thousands of its fighters from detention facilities while vulnerable children in displaced persons camps in Syria are “the potential next generation of ISIS.”

ISIS Attack Trends

ISIS activity, overall operational capacity, and capabilities **continued to decline** in both Iraq and Syria.

ISIS remained **incapable** of mounting frequent, large, complex attacks against regional populations.

In both Iraq and Syria ISIS is operating in a **survival posture** with a low operational pace.

IRAQ

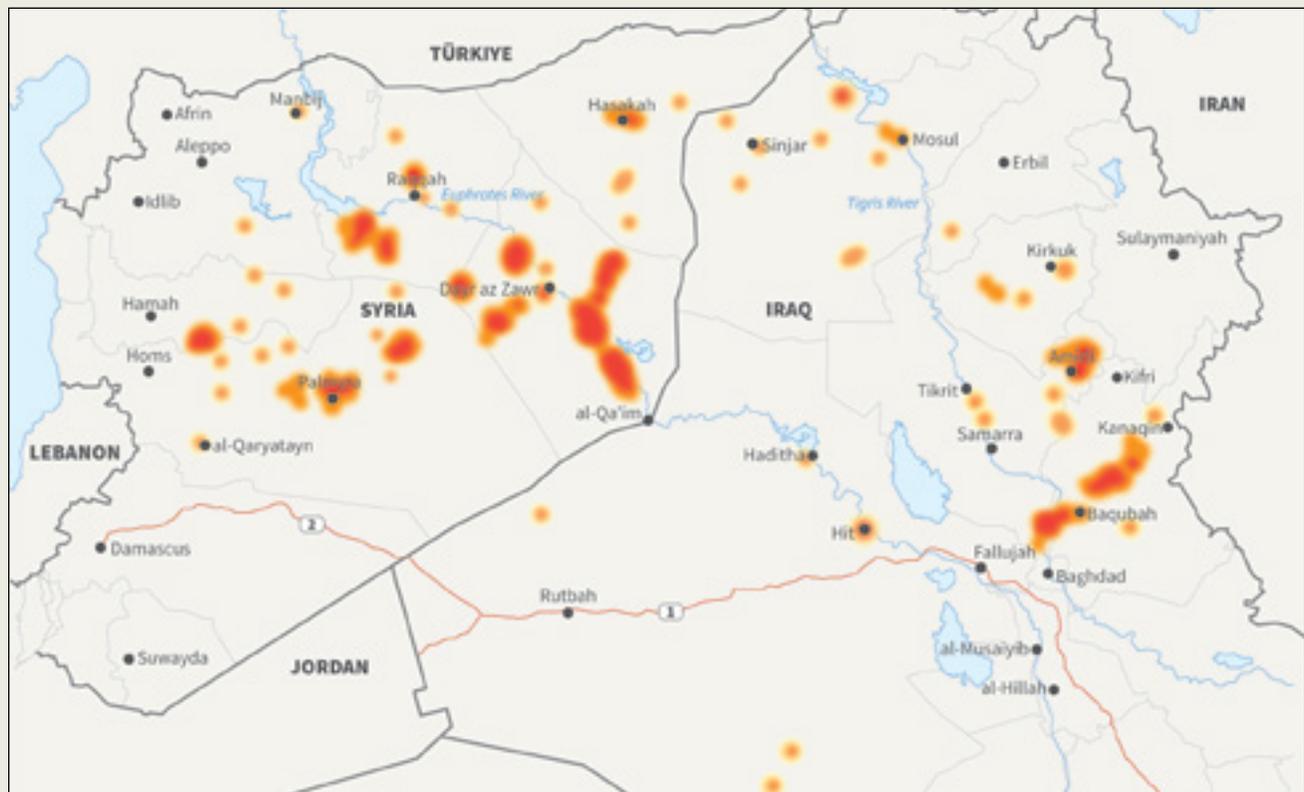
ISIS attacks focused on the north Baghdad, Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah ad-Din provinces. Most attacks **were simple IEDs, small-arms ambushes, or assassinations.**

ISIS continued to operate in **rural mountainous areas** and along the porous Iraq-Syria border.

SYRIA

With a continued loss of leadership, the number and frequency of ISIS attacks continued to decline; most **targeted the SDF** with simple tactics and small arms.

ISIS reportedly conducted large-scale **attacks on truffle foragers** and possibly targeted sheep herders in areas of the Syrian Desert under the control of the Syrian regime and Russian forces. During the quarter, ISIS is suspected to have killed more than 95 truffle hunters and kidnapped dozens more.



ISIS Attacks by Month, October 2020–March 2023



ISIS Capability Assessment

LEADERSHIP: ISIS continued to suffer **leadership losses** in Iraq and Syria, following on the killings in 2022 of two consecutive ISIS caliphs and numerous senior leaders and operations plotters and facilitators. The DIA assessed that the losses at least temporarily degraded local insurgent and external attack capabilities. ISIS has likely accelerated a shift toward a new generation of senior-most leaders who are probably deliberately appointed and have been groomed for senior positions.

STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES: ISIS almost certainly persists in its **objective to revive its insurgency** in Syria, reconstitute its forces and capacity, and ultimately recover territory. It also remained intent on breaking fighters out of SDF-run detention facilities, particularly in Raqqah. In Iraq, a reduced frequency of ISIS attacks was a deliberate strategy to enable the group to rebuild and recover from losses.

TACTICS: ISIS spread its propaganda with increasingly sophisticated and prolific use of **information and communications technologies**, promoting conflict with other groups, competition for revenue sources, and other recruitment and incitement efforts.

ISIS also continued to try to **exploit vulnerabilities and corruption** in the SDF to infiltrate SDF-administered detention facilities and free its fighters.

EXTERNAL OPERATIONS: ISIS maintained 19 publicly recognized branches worldwide and claimed responsibility for attacks in dozens of countries. The group remains **intent on conducting attacks abroad**, publicly calling for attacks against U.S. interests in the Middle East and in the West. But ISIS Core probably **lacks the ability to conduct** attacks against the U.S. homeland; threats to the West stem mainly from radicalized individuals. ISIS has not claimed responsibility for any attacks in the United States or Europe in 2023.

ISIS violence continued to spread, especially in Africa, where the group's branches exploit local conflict dynamics, and Afghanistan, where ISIS-Khorasan demonstrated its ability to mount attacks in multiple areas.

FINANCES: Coalition and law enforcement actions against ISIS led to diminishing ISIS cash reserves in Iraq and Syria. ISIS Core maintains access to as much as **\$25 million in cash reserves**; the United Nations assessed group's reserves were as high as \$50 million. ISIS used funds to finance operations, recruitment, propaganda activities, and support networks around the world, and to secure the release of its members from detention facilities and displaced persons camps. ISIS may have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on payments to fighters and assistance to the families of deceased or imprisoned fighters.

Due to **declining revenue**, ISIS continued to raise funds through extortion, looting, donations, kidnapping for ransom, livestock theft, and, in Syria, oil smuggling. ISIS also reportedly began to **launder money** through investments in legitimate businesses such as hotels and real estate in Iraq and Syria.

ISIS continued to use cash, **informal transfer networks** known as hawalas, virtual currencies, and online fundraising platforms to transfer funds. Supporters smuggled funds to individuals in al-Hol through intermediaries in Türkiye or other neighboring countries. Al-Hol supporters received up to \$20,000 a month via the hawala system.

5,000 to 7,000

Estimated number of ISIS members and supporters across Iraq and Syria, half of whom are fighters, down from as many as 10,000 fighters in 2022 and 18,000 in 2020.

–United Nations

Sources: See Endnotes on page 112.





U.S. Army Soldiers safely secure a building during a combined training exercise, Al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

IRAQ

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IRAQ

In Iraq, the Coalition’s Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) operates at the invitation of the Iraqi government in an advise, assist, and enable role to support Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) operations to defeat ISIS.⁴³ In addition, the U.S. Government supports the development of a capable and responsive Iraqi government and a strong Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR); encourages inclusive economic growth; and supports vulnerable communities as they transition from stabilization to recovery.⁴⁴

SECURITY

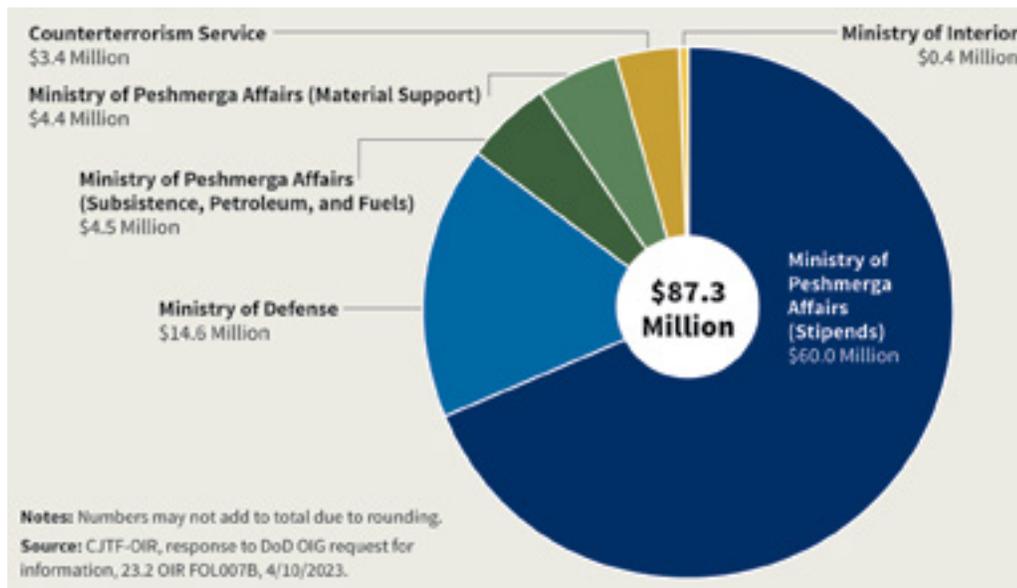
The U.S. Government and Coalition partners pursue their security objectives in Iraq through several organizations and funding mechanisms. CJTF-OIR provides advising and assistance to senior ISF and KSF leaders at the operational level. CJTF-OIR coordinates information and activity with other organizations that provide ministerial-level advising to security forces in Iraq, including the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, and NATO Mission-Iraq (NMI).⁴⁵ (See page 15.)

Funding: CJTF-OIR uses the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) as the primary vehicle for providing materiel and other support to Iraqi partner forces. Of the \$475 million CTEF appropriation for FY 2023, \$315 million was designated to support partner forces in Iraq.⁴⁶ During the quarter, CJTF-OIR used the CTEF to provide \$87.3 million in materiel and support to partner forces in Iraq.⁴⁷ (See Figure 2.)

During the quarter, CJTF-OIR used the CTEF to provide \$87.3 million in materiel and support to partner forces in Iraq.

Figure 2.

CTEF-funded Support to Iraq, January–March 2023



COALITION ADVISING IN IRAQ

Kurdish Security Forces

Coalition advisors work with leaders from the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs at the Kurdistan Coordination Center to enhance operational-level command and control, promote coordination with the ISF, and support other ministry reform objectives. The advisors occasionally work with lower-level KSF units.

Iraqi Security Forces

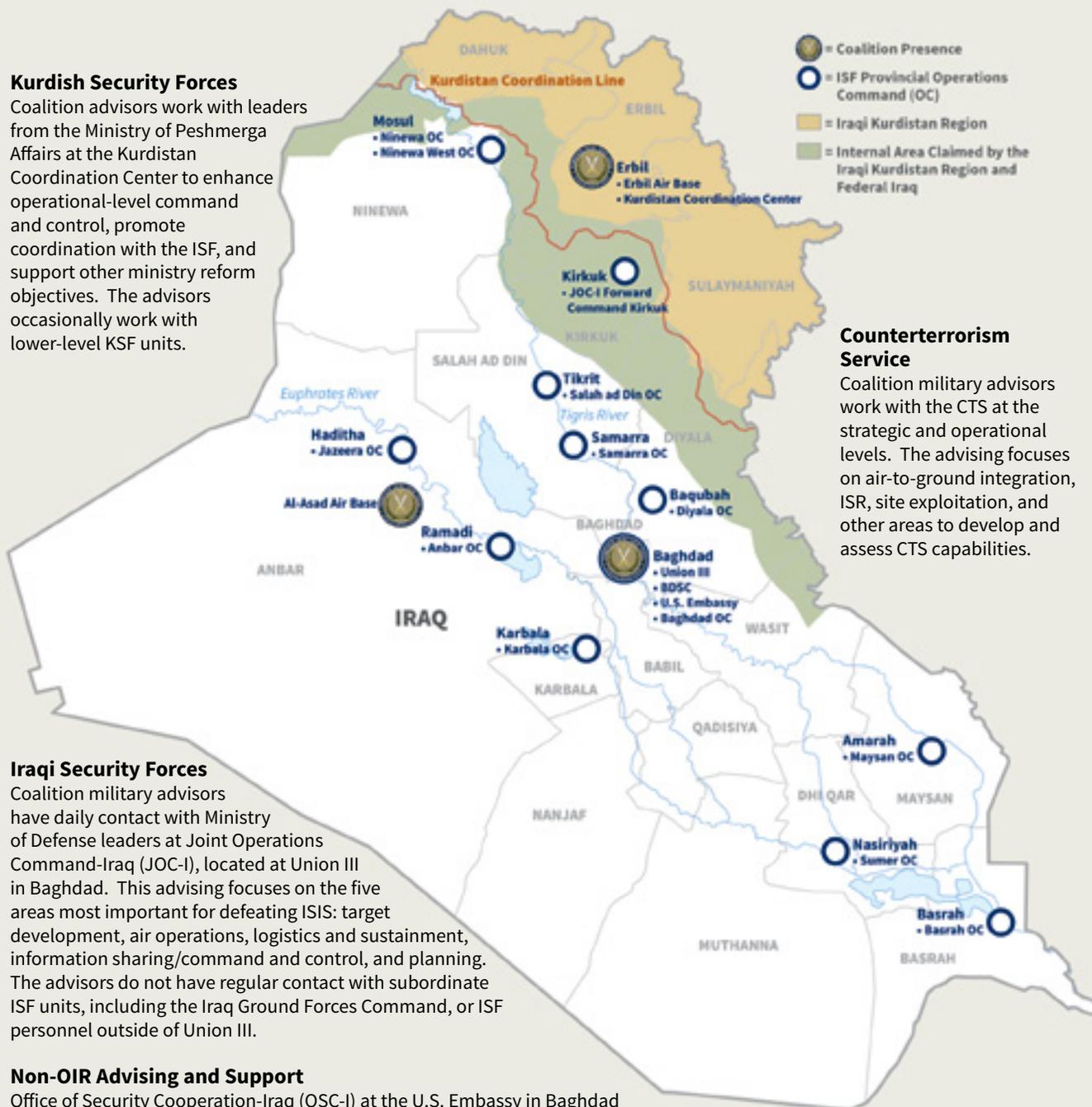
Coalition military advisors have daily contact with Ministry of Defense leaders at Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I), located at Union III in Baghdad. This advising focuses on the five areas most important for defeating ISIS: target development, air operations, logistics and sustainment, information sharing/command and control, and planning. The advisors do not have regular contact with subordinate ISF units, including the Iraq Ground Forces Command, or ISF personnel outside of Union III.

Non-OIR Advising and Support

Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad conducts bilateral security assistance and security cooperation activities, including training, with partner forces. NATO Mission-Iraq advises ISF leaders at the ministerial level.

Counterterrorism Service

Coalition military advisors work with the CTS at the strategic and operational levels. The advising focuses on air-to-ground integration, ISR, site exploitation, and other areas to develop and assess CTS capabilities.



Note: OCs are not shown in their actual location within each province.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 22.2 OIR 035, 3/23/2022; Michael Knights and Alex Almeida, "Back to Basics: U.S.-Iraq Security Cooperation in the Post-Combat Era," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 10/26/2021.

In addition to CTEF, Congress approved \$1.25 billion for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Iraq (\$250 million annually) between FY 2019 and FY 2023.⁴⁸ Once appropriated, the funds are placed in Iraq’s Trust Fund and are available to be spent on specific Foreign Military Sales cases.⁴⁹ As of the end of the quarter, nearly \$371 million of FY 2019 through FY 2023 funds had been spent.⁵⁰ State said that current FMF-funded Foreign Military Sales cases under negotiation include development of a regional logistics hub for the KSF; unmanned aerial surveillance systems; and equipment, training, and maintenance support for combat engineering, counter-improvised explosive device, and explosive ordnance disposal.⁵¹

End-Use Monitoring: CJTF-OIR personnel conduct end-use monitoring (EUM) and enhanced end-use monitoring (EEUM) inspections in Iraq but in a limited capacity due to ongoing security concerns and Regional Security Office policies for travel. Due to travel restrictions, the majority of EEUM inspections occur in and around Baghdad. Even with restrictions, U.S. personnel are still able to inspect most of the items required under the EEUM program. However, the security environment makes it difficult to inspect night vision devices that are deployed throughout the country. The Iraqi government submitted night vision device control plans and quarterly inventories as required under the Golden Sentry Program.⁵²

During the quarter, CJTF-OIR inspected night vision devices that are being repaired at the Electrical Mechanical Engineering Facility at Camp Taji. They also inspected the entire F-16 fleet on March 13 at Balad Air Base. Three EEUM inspections with Iraq’s Army Aviation and the Iraq’s Federal Intelligence and Investigation Agency were cancelled due to security resource priorities and movement restrictions.⁵³

Leahy Vetting: State reported that OSC-I was not aware of any violations of the Leahy Law committed during the quarter by ISF or KSF units that received U.S. equipment and training. The Leahy Law are amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 that prohibit the United States from furnishing certain assistance to a unit of a foreign security force if State has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights.⁵⁴

ISF OPERATIONS AND PLANNING

ISF Launches New Counter-ISIS Operation

The ISF continued to demonstrate its ability to conduct complex, multi-day, combined force operations against ISIS. The ISF executed two “named” counter-ISIS operations during the quarter, Operation Righteous Saber I and II, and was planning a third operation, called Righteous Saber III.⁵⁵

Coalition advisors reported observing “slow positive changes” in the execution of Operation Righteous Saber I as Iraqi forces began holding terrain through the establishment of fortifications. Previously, ISF operations often consisted of search and clearance operations and did not involve holding cleared areas.⁵⁶ Coalition forces also partnered with the ISF on some counter-ISIS operations. The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) reported that CJTF-OIR partnered with the ISF on 94 operations during the quarter, resulting in 33 ISIS operatives killed and at least 50 detained.⁵⁷

CJTF-OIR personnel conduct EUM and EEUM inspections in Iraq but in a limited capacity due to ongoing security concerns.

Table 1.

ISF Capability During the Quarter

Function	Capability
Operations	The Operations Directorate collects and assembles data from ISF activities. However, neither the directorate nor the JOC-I “Operations Floor” has the capacity to assess operations in progress, measure any deviation from what was planned, or propose an alternate plan while operations are in progress. The JOC-I has begun to maintain a map and two white boards to track operations in real time, and recently installed a Harris radio system on the Operations Floor that allows the JOC-I to track the movement of ground forces and communicate orders during ground operations.
Intelligence	The Intelligence Directorate can rely on a network of thermal cameras and reports from seven Iraqi intelligence agencies to gather information on ISIS movements and activities, which allows the directorate to anticipate and counter ISIS attacks. The directorate feeds information collected from intelligence agencies, ISF branches, and Coalition drones to an Iraqi Strike Cell to enable it to conduct operations against ISIS. Coalition advisors encouraged the directorate to strengthen intelligence sharing with Iraqi intelligence agencies and the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) to better drive operations and assess threats.
Planning	The JOC-I has a dedicated planning team but its planning process lacks cross-functional involvement from other directorates within the JOC-I. This deficit prevents planning for combined arms operations. Despite this shortcoming, the JOC-I Deputy Commander and the planning directorate started planning major counter-ISIS operations with the goal of permanently controlling territory.
Command and Control	The Iraqi Army is modernizing its technology, tactics, and procedures. However, the Operations Floor is not using the Harris radio system that CJTF-OIR provided to it and while some Army divisions are using the system, their ability to use it is “below Coalition expectations.”
Fires	The ISF Fires Cell demonstrated no change in the use of artillery during the quarter. The Fires Cell does not solicit Coalition advice on fires for the military decision making process or use it when provided. The advisors’ primary interaction with the Iraqi Fires Cell is through train-the-trainer sessions for key artillery units.
Sustainment and Logistics	The Logistics and Sustainment Directorate continues to focus primarily on the acquisition of military materiel from the Coalition and does not participate in the planning or execution of counter-ISIS operations, partially due to the lack of an Iraqi budget resolution and partially due to the lack of institutional logistics practices.

Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.2 OIR 024 and 23.2 OIR 025, 3/23/2023.

Coalition advisors continued to engage multiple directorates within the Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I) and encourage ISF leaders to better track and assess operations in progress and increase intelligence sharing, among other key advice. CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF continued to show incremental progress in developing key warfighting functions but continues to lack some of the integration skills and capacity necessary to plan, resource, and execute effective counter-ISIS operations.⁵⁸ (See Table 1.)

Coalition Advisors Develop Relationships with Some Newly Appointed Iraqi Security Leaders

CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advisors have developed positive relationships with several senior security officials appointed following the formation of Iraq’s new government in October 2022. However, Coalition advisors have not maintained a formal advisory

relationship with some key new appointees in intelligence.⁵⁹ In addition, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that the new appointees include some individuals with strong ties to Iran-aligned militias.⁶⁰

Coalition advisors maintain a “positive and strong relationship” with the new JOC-I Deputy Commander, Staff Lieutenant General Qais Muhammadawi, whom CJTF-OIR describes as “receptive to feedback” from Coalition advisors and as one who makes time to meet with Coalition leadership at least once a week despite his busy schedule.⁶¹ CJTF-OIR reported a “steady and resilient” relationship with Major General Hisham al-Jabiri, the Counterterrorism Service’s Intelligence Director.⁶²

CJTF-OIR said that key changes in Iraqi security leadership did not negatively affect the OIR campaign during the quarter, including the execution of ISF “named operations” under the new JOC-I Deputy Commander.⁶³

CJTF-OIR said that key changes in Iraqi security leadership did not negatively affect the OIR campaign during the quarter.

ISF Joint Information Operations Center Will Focus on Psychological Operations

CJTF-OIR reported that the Coalition advised and assisted the ISF as it continued to develop and man the Joint Information Operations Center (JIOC), a new unit that involves personnel from multiple ISF components, including the CTS, MoPA, and several Iraqi intelligence agencies. The center, which was established in September 2022, is 85 to 90 percent manned with about 25 personnel.⁶⁴

Coalition public affairs advising to the JOC-I focuses on media activities; media planning; monitoring and analysis of the information environment; and the production of operational messaging via radio broadcasts, print and social media, outreach activities, and internal communication. Coalition advisors also provide basic and advanced media training, counter-propaganda training, and a train-the-trainers course.⁶⁵ The CTS also provided psychological operations training to the JIOC, with the goal of making the CTS the only entity tutoring JIOC personnel on psychological operations.⁶⁶

In addition to the JIOC, the Iraqi Security Media Cell operates a small public affairs department within the JOC-I. The Security Media Cell has limited funding and capabilities, which include social media (mainly Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram), an eight-page weekly newspaper, and a radio station.⁶⁷ CJTF-OIR reported that the Security Media Cell releases a “steady drumbeat of messages daily” that highlight the successes of counter-ISIS operations to reinforce the perception among Iraqis that the ISF is a capable institution.⁶⁸

Coalition advisors work with the Security Media Cell to improve its ability to analyze media trends; provide media coverage of ongoing operations; improve analysis of target audiences; create a website; and establish a network with subordinate public affairs officers at the provincial operational command level.⁶⁹ CJTF-OIR reported that Security Media Cell personnel are proactive and responsive to Coalition advising and support.⁷⁰

NMI Expands Advisory Role

NATO Mission-Iraq (NMI) is a noncombat advisory mission that seeks to support Iraqi efforts to build transparent and effective security institutions and armed forces. The mission was established in 2018 at the request of the Iraqi government.⁷¹

CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advisors continue to share information with NMI so that NMI can address ISF shortcomings during its interactions with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.⁷² During the quarter, Coalition advisors shared two ISF gaps in operations: deficits in the ISF artillery capability and the lack of an integrated air cell to track Iraqi air assets.⁷³ Additionally, USCENTCOM reported that NMI continued to work with OSC-I to create and implement an electronic Human Resource Management System to support personnel management at the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs.⁷⁴ The U.S. Embassy's Treasury and Economics sections conducted biweekly meetings with stakeholders to develop the electronic pay capabilities, which will include biometrics software.⁷⁵ USCENTCOM said that a similar electronic payments system is not planned for the Ministry of Interior.⁷⁶

Iraqi Border Guards to Secure IKR Border with Iran

According to media reports, Iraq and Iran signed an agreement in March to secure the portion of the border between Iran and the IKR.⁷⁷ According to those reports, Iran sought the agreement to prevent armed Kurdish-Iranian dissidents from staging cross-border attacks from the Kurdish region into Iran.⁷⁸

CJTF-OIR said that readouts from the Iran-Iraq security coordination agreement did not indicate any Kurdish involvement or compliance with the initiative. Coalition advisors were unable to offer any further insight as to how the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) will implement the border security task.⁷⁹ Local media reported that the new border force could have as many as 6,000 personnel, including 2,600 from Kurdish areas.⁸⁰ CJTF-OIR, citing press reporting, stated that the Iraqi government agreed in December to fund 3,000 new Border Guards for deployment along the borders with Türkiye and Iran.⁸¹

According to CJTF-OIR, the new personnel will be subordinate to the MoI.⁸² The KRG and Iraqi government are sensitive to ISF and KSF personnel operating inside the other's recognized areas, and since 2003, the two sides have observed an agreement where KSF and ISF do not unilaterally enter the other's areas of control. Thus, the ISF is unlikely to send troops to the IKR to enforce the new security agreement, CJTF-OIR said.⁸³

Separately, news media reported that Iraq signed an agreement on border security with Saudi Arabia, the first agreement between the two countries since 1983.⁸⁴ That agreement follows the 2020 reopening of the Arar border crossing, the only crossing between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, which had been shut since the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.⁸⁵

USCENTCOM reported significant gains at the strategic level in the efforts of the United Nation, NATO, and the European Union missions to enhance Iraqi border security.⁸⁶ Efforts included meeting with the UN de-mining commission to address de-mining along Iraq’s borders.⁸⁷ Additionally, 303 Iraqi Border Guard train-the-trainers graduated from a training session in Jordan during the quarter and 9 Iraqi Border Guard officers were preparing to visit the southern border of the United States to learn about border control from the Department of Homeland Security.⁸⁸

ISF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

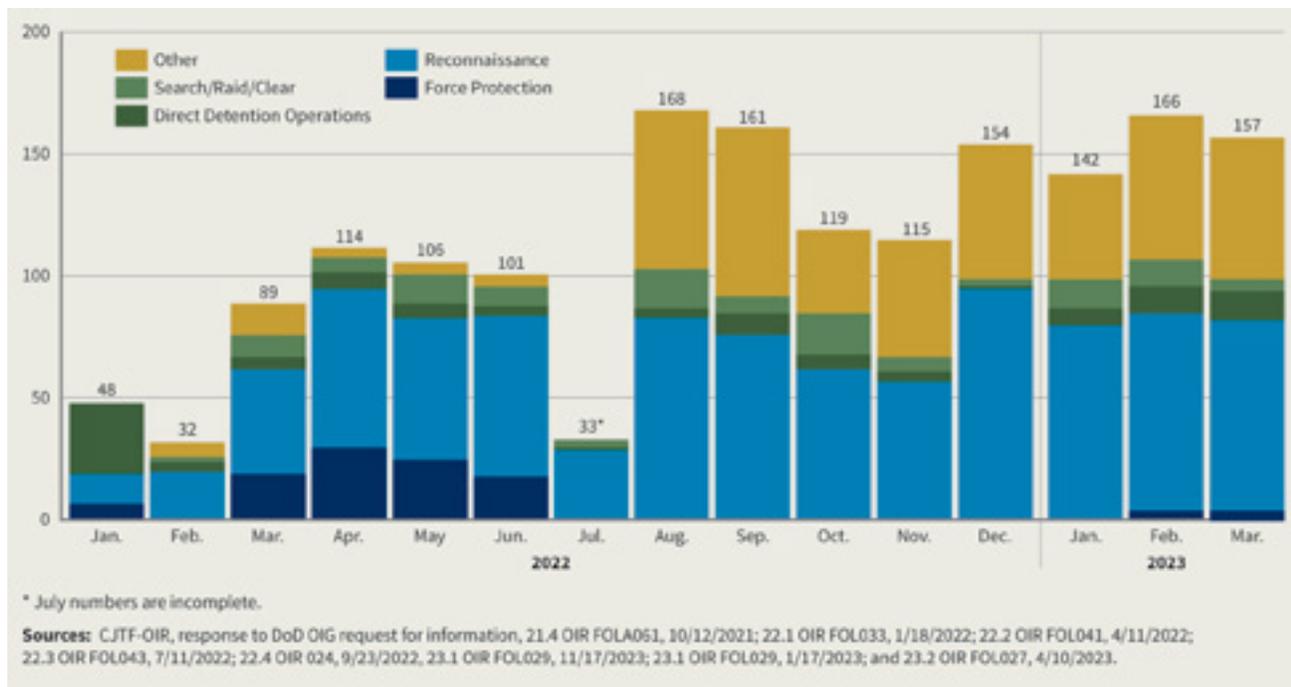
CTS Remains a Key Partner for Coalition Counter-ISIS Efforts, While FIIA Partnership is Limited

The CTS is Iraq’s premier special operations force and one of the Coalition’s primary partners for targeting ISIS leadership and key facilitators in Iraq. During the quarter, the CTS conducted 465 operations.⁸⁹ (See Figure 3.) Of these, at least 28 operations were partnered with the Coalition, resulting in six ISIS detainees and 24 ISIS members killed.⁹⁰

CJTF-OIR reported that there were no critical shortfalls in the CTS’s targeted operations during the quarter. However, the CTS needs to improve its integration and interaction with other units within the ISF, particularly as the role of Coalition forces decreases and the ISF assumes greater responsibility for Iraq’s security.⁹¹ The CTS did not report any joint

Figure 3.

CTS Operations by Type, January 2022–March 2023



The CTS conviction rate during the quarter was over 90 percent, similar to the previous quarter and up from 40 to 50 percent in January 2022—an improvement that CJTF-OIR attributed to Coalition legal advising.

operations with or support from other ISF units, including the MoI’s Federal Intelligence and Investigations Agency (FIIA), an agency that plays a key role in counter-ISIS efforts.⁹²

Coalition advisors have limited access to the FIIA. Since the formation of the new Iraqi government and consequent change in leadership at the FIIA, the Coalition has postponed equipment deliveries and advising engagements until the new FIIA hierarchy can be vetted, as is standard practice.⁹³ CJTF-OIR said this quarter that Coalition advisors have not maintained a formal advisory relationship with FIIA since the former FIIA chief, Lt. Gen. Ahmed Taha Hashim, commonly known as Abu Ragheef, was relieved by Iraqi Prime Minister al-Sudani in late November 2022. However, CJTF-OIR has maintained routine phone contact with FIIA personnel and periodic in-person meetings with the FIIA liaison officer during the quarter.⁹⁴

Conviction Rates of ISIS Members Captured by the CTS Remains High

CJTF-OIR has reported steady improvement in the CTS’s ability to bring ISIS detainees to justice. The CTS conviction rate during the quarter was over 90 percent, similar to the previous quarter and up from 40 to 50 percent in January 2022—an improvement that CJTF-OIR attributed to Coalition legal advising.⁹⁵

Coalition legal advisors continued to advise both the CTS legal and investigations departments during the quarter, focusing on improved sensitive site exploitation techniques to ensure all evidence is being collected and exploited to maximize chances of conviction of ISIS detainees at trial. Coalition advisors continued to engage tactical-level advisors, Coalition partners, and the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure maximum emphasis is put on the collection of evidence.⁹⁶

CJTF-OIR reported that a recent CTEF delivery to the Special Forensics Investigations Laboratory provided additional space and equipment to improve in both digital and forensic exploitation of captured enemy material. Coalition advisors also met with the CTS Judge on a frequent basis during the quarter to discuss the legal and investigations process, areas for improvement in the CTS process, as well as warranting standards. Legal advisors have been advocating for the CTEF-acquired Automated Biometric Information System to be reallocated to the CTS to improve fingerprint analysis and provide improved evidence for use during trials.⁹⁷

CJTF-OIR said that it maintains a “steady and resilient” relationship with the CTS Director of Intelligence, Major General Hisham Adnan Lefte al-Jabiri.⁹⁸ Major General al-Jabiri views the Coalition presence in Iraq as vital to the security and survival of Iraq as a sovereign nation. Al-Jabiri and his staff have a proven record of intelligence successes and CTS maintains intelligence capabilities on par or exceeding that of other Iraqi intelligence and security agencies.⁹⁹

CTS Recruitment Stalled Pending New Budget

The CTS has not conducted significant force generation since 2017, largely due to Iraqi government budgetary constraints. The CTS training school graduates only 20 to 30 CTS officers per year. CJTF-OIR reported that pending the final approval of the Iraqi government budget later this spring, the proposed funding would enable the CTS to recruit 3,500 new soldiers. Until the Iraqi government passes the budget, the CTS will face continued challenges to maintaining force readiness as its end-strength decreases and operational capability degrades. The Coalition did not implement any actions for ISF force generation during the quarter.¹⁰⁰

OSC-I Provides Radio Equipment to CTS in First Section 333-Funded Case

USCENTCOM reported that the CTS received Harris radio communication equipment in February, marking the first time in the history of OSC-I that a Section 333-funded transfer of equipment was delivered. Section 333 is a Title 10 provision that allows the DoD to provide training or equipment to foreign forces for the purpose of building partner capacity, as opposed to CTEF or Title 22 programs administered through State.¹⁰¹ The radio equipment was consolidated at Ali al-Salem Air Base in Kuwait and flown to the Iraqi air base next to the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, and all equipment was accounted for and signed over to the CTS. The CTS can access 2 years of field contractor support upon request. USCENTCOM said that the FY 2021 section 333 case is valued at \$7.6 million, with the equipment valued near \$6 million and the training and support for the next two years valued at \$1.5 million.¹⁰²

The CTS also received \$2.7 million in CTEF equipment this quarter, including vehicles to improve mobility and strengthen sustainment capabilities. CJTF-OIR noted that no CTEF-provided equipment required additional training or specialized attention.¹⁰³

ISF AIR OPERATIONS AND FIRE SUPPORT

Iraqi Air Power Still Dependent on Coalition Support for Most Strikes

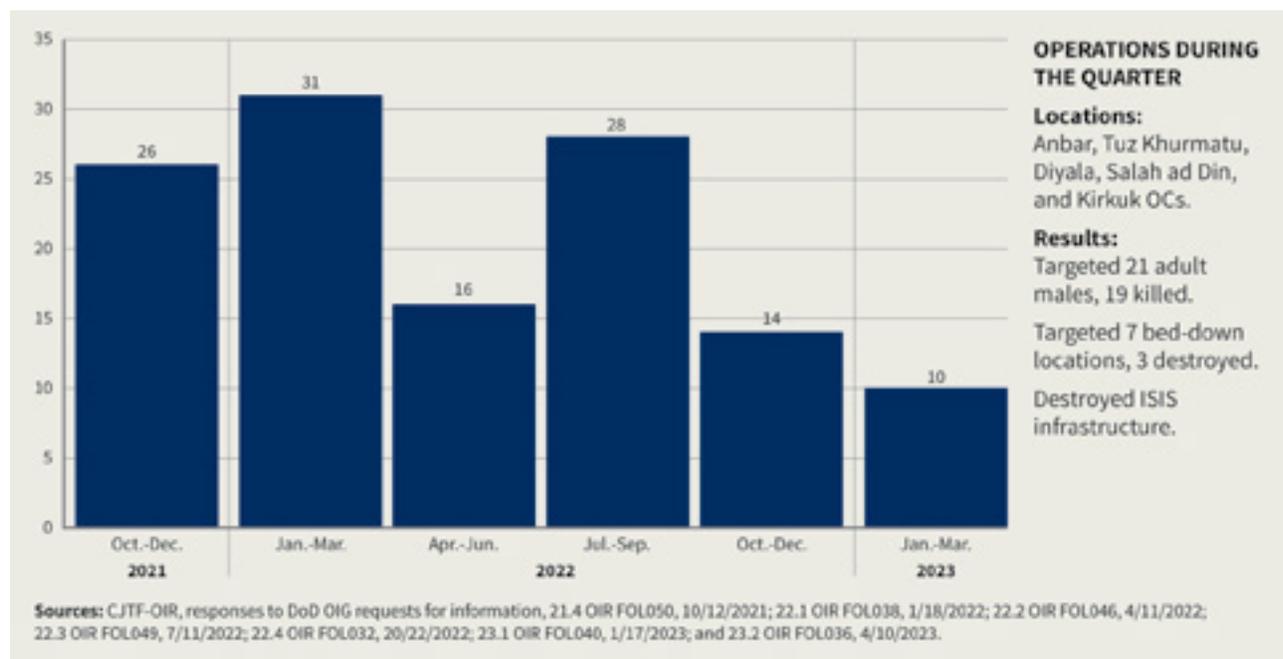
This quarter the ISF conducted 10 airstrikes in support of counter-ISIS operations, compared to 14 strikes in the previous quarter.¹⁰⁴ (See Figure 4.)

CJTF-OIR reported that the JOC-I conducted an independent strike on February 12 with no support from Coalition resources, using an F-16 to target a suspected ISIS fighter in Salah ad Din province with six precision guided bombs.¹⁰⁵ This was the fourth airstrike that the ISF conducted entirely without Coalition support; the first occurred in September 2022.¹⁰⁶ CJTF-OIR said that Coalition advisors enabled all other Iraqi strikes through ISR observation, verbal direction to targets, and terminal guidance of guided munitions.¹⁰⁷

Additional strikes supported by the Coalition involved ISF F-16s fighters employing GBU-10 and GBU-12 laser guided bombs, AC-208s utilizing AGM-114 Hellfire missiles, and EC-635 Eurocopter light attack helicopters using 7.62mm machine guns.¹⁰⁸ The ISF

CJTF-OIR reported that pending the final approval of the Iraqi government budget later this spring, the proposed funding would enable the CTS to recruit 3,500 new soldiers.

Figure 4.

Counter-ISIS Airstrikes by Iraqi Aircraft, October 2021-March 2023

continued to use only U.S.-supplied aircraft in its fleet for strikes; it did not use Russian-produced Mi-28 or Mi-35 attack helicopters, its Chinese-produced CH-4 armed UAS, or its Czech-produced L-159 light fighters.¹⁰⁹ Iraq's F-16s continue to be the most reliable shooting platform. CJTF-OIR noted that Iraqi AC-208 Cessna aircraft have increased their participation in strike operations this quarter and said that while not being the "shooter" in many strikes, the Cessna aircraft are available in the air, armed, and ready if required.¹¹⁰

Coalition advisors continued to encourage Iraqi F-16 pilots to laser designate their own munitions if the situation dictates. Coalition assets can provide laser designation for strikes when ISF aircraft are engaging difficult targets such as when suspected ISIS fighters are partially obstructed by heavy vegetation or if the targets are mobile.¹¹¹

ISF Expands ISR Coverage Despite Lacking Sufficient Platforms

CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi Air Force remains heavily reliant on Coalition intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to identify and strike ISIS targets. Although the Coalition assesses that the ISF have good intelligence reporting from their intelligence agencies, the ISF lack medium-altitude long-range ISR platforms to conduct collection of reported areas of interest and surveil targets. Iraqi Air Force assets are currently much better at dynamic tasking and operation, where intelligence reports or thermal cameras provide more immediate information from close proximity to suspected ISIS locations that allow Iraqi ISR assets to be quickly re-tasked and gain positive identification of potential targets.¹¹²

STATUS OF U.S.-SUPPLIED AIR FLEET AND EQUIPMENT

USCENTCOM reported that Russian-made aircraft in the ISF fleet remain in disrepair due to the inability to acquire parts because of the sanctions related to the war in Ukraine. The readiness of Western-made aircraft in the ISF fleet remained unchanged during the quarter. USCENTCOM provided the following status update of key U.S.-supplied ISF equipment and support contracts during the quarter:



F-16: 66 percent mission capable. The Iraqi Air Force (IqAF) adequately perform air-to-ground missions with current parts and personnel on hand. The AIM-7 air-to-air missiles for use on Iraq's F-16s are at a point of concern because of the lack of replacements or repair vendors for their Continuous Wave Illuminators, which guide the munition to its target. OSC-I is exploring a way to fill this potential capability gap.



King Air 350: Regular operations tempo. The IqAF used the aircraft more for light transport and training sorties than for ISR.



AC-208: Fully mission capable. The IqAF is capable of supporting basic maintenance and sortie generation without U.S. assistance. Shortcomings include long-term maintenance and spare parts supply, as well as a lack of advanced training on mission systems. Both issues are being addressed in ongoing support contract extension and negotiations for a systems upgrade.



Bell 407 and UH-1: A hard landing of a Bell 407 last quarter resulted in a temporary stand-down of the ISF's Bell 407 fleet to inspect all engines for a faulty device. The helicopters resumed operation this quarter. Parts shipments continue to flow into Iraq to support the Bell helicopter models.



C-130: Recently used to fly to Türkiye and Syria to support earthquake-related humanitarian assistance and disaster recovery efforts. The IqAF also uses the C-130 for distinguished visitor transport and supply pick up.



Scan Eagle: Fully mission capable. The IqAAC received a shipment of batteries for its Scan Eagle UAS which brought the aircraft to a fully mission capable status. However, the Scan Eagles have not been tasked for missions. Coalition advisors worked to address confusion in the JOC-I on who has tasking authority that may contribute to underutilization.

Air Defense: Significant gaps in capability and coordination. The ISF's TPS-77 radar located in Kirkuk province has been inoperable due to issues with the city's electrical power and the onsite generators. Weak collaboration between the Iraqi Air Defense Command, which controls air surveillance and ground-based air defense systems, and the IqAF, which has aircraft to conduct visual identification and F-16s to conduct airborne air defense of Iraqi airspace, remains a concern. Iraq's ability to conduct detect, track, and identify air targets in its airspace has significant gaps in capability and coordination.

Sources: USCENTCOM, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.2 OIR 035, 3/23/2023; CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 4/19/2023.

The Iraqis did not use U.S.-produced Scan Eagle UAS this quarter due to issues with obtaining replacement batteries, command and control, and the location of the airframes being out of range of areas where ISF operations were being conducted.

According to CJTF-OIR, Iraqi use of their own fixed wing ISR platforms steadily increased in capability and effectiveness this quarter. The total number of fixed wing ISR hours flown increased from 85 in January to 139 in February and 253 in March, providing coverage during gaps in Coalition ISR coverage.¹¹³ CJTF-OIR noted that the ISF conducted sorties with their Chinese-produced CH-4 UAS during the quarter, increasing flight hours from 37 in January to 86 in February. Meanwhile, the Iraqis did not use U.S.-produced Scan Eagle UAS this quarter due to issues with obtaining replacement batteries, command and control, and the location of the airframes being out of range of areas where ISF operations were being conducted.¹¹⁴ CJTF-OIR said that the Scan Eagles are expected to re-enter operational service in the coming months. Additionally, A/RC-208 Cessna manned aircraft provided 59 hours of ISR coverage this quarter, while increasing their integration into strikes as the strike platform.¹¹⁵

CJTF-OIR acknowledged that in recent months, the Iraqi Air Force has mainly used its King Air 350 aircraft as transports rather than as manned ISR for which they were designed. However, the ISF increased the number of King Air sorties dedicated to ISR this quarter from 9 hours in January to 32 in February. CJTF-OIR said that all Iraqi ISR platforms saw an increase in the frequency and duration that their full motion video feed was transmitted directly to the JOC-I floor to support ongoing operations.¹¹⁶

CJTF-OIR assessed that none of the Iraqi ISR platforms can currently replace the Coalition platforms completely. Coalition ISR platforms are high-altitude long-endurance platforms that are able to remain on station for a significantly longer duration than anything in the Iraqi fleet, offering more persistent coverage. Coalition ISR platforms are also equipped with better and more modern sensors than Iraqi ISR platforms. The Iraqi government has not yet purchased ISR platforms with similar capabilities as those used by the Coalition.¹¹⁷ The U.S. Government has historically restricted export of medium- and high-altitude long-endurance platforms, including the MQ-9 and MQ-1C UAS; China, Turkey, and Israel are the only exporters of comparable ISR aircraft.¹¹⁸

Despite these limitations, CJTF-OIR assessed that the ISF is becoming more experienced in using ISR. CJTF-OIR explained that during recent operations, the JOC-I Targeting Cell produced an ISR synchronization matrix, a planning tool to ensure different ISR platforms are integrated in a way that matches the JOC-I commander's priorities. This allowed them to better integrate multiple ISR platforms into ongoing ISF ground operations. CJTF-OIR said that this speaks to the growing capability and the positive trend in Iraqi ISR use and planning. CJTF-OIR expects that as time goes on the ISF's proficiency and planning capabilities will continue to grow.¹¹⁹

CJTF-OIR also reported that the JOC-I Strike Cell continues to improve its integration of Iraqi ISR assets into the "find, fix, and finish process," as shown by the increase in Iraqi ISR sorties and the independent strike during the quarter. During the independent strike, the ISF utilized one of its Puma tactical UAS to provide full motion video that the JOC-I Strike Cell could view to authorize the AC-208 strike aircraft to engage an ISIS target. CJTF-OIR said that the JOC-I leadership has been receptive to Coalition advice. The JOC-I Strike Cell continues to experience shortcomings with communications equipment, though CJTF-OIR plans to deliver equipment to remedy these issues in the coming year.¹²⁰

ISF Personnel Improving Target Development Process

CJTF-OIR stated that Coalition advisors observed progress in the ISF's target development capabilities during the quarter, including utilizing specially trained personnel to coordinate ISR operations and conduct strikes. For example, the Iraqi Air Liaison Officers (IALO) in the JOC-I Strike Cell continued to work with Coalition Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC) on target development, prioritizing tasks, and communication to enable Iraqi strike platforms to perform kinetic actions. CJTF-OIR said that there were multiple operations where the IALOs developed target packages themselves, including strikes independent of Coalition support. The IALOs have also been trained to teach and brief target package development to their successors and have experience themselves directing Iraqi aircraft and employing munitions for strikes with Coalition JTAC assistance.¹²¹

The CTS school continued to run courses for the Iraqi Tactical Air Controller (ITAC) program to develop CTS operators capable of coordinating air support and directing airstrikes dynamically. CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advisors do not have detailed information on the tactical employment of ITACs in counter-ISIS operations, but said that the CTS is running one basic and one advanced ITAC course per year.¹²² Last quarter, CJTF-OIR stated that Kurdish counterterrorism personnel were participating in the CTS ITAC course in an effort to build interoperability.¹²³ However, CJTF-OIR said this quarter that due to the language barrier, most KSF personnel did not meet the course standards to graduate. Only two KSF personnel graduated but CJTF-OIR does not track them as ITACs.¹²⁴

Additionally, CJTF-OIR said that five ISF personnel graduated from the Intelligence Tactical Controller (ITC) course during the quarter, with two still working within the JOC-I Targeting Cell. The ITC training was designed to provide Iraqi drone operators the necessary skills to communicate with and direct their organic UAS platforms in target development and dynamic operations. CJTF-OIR explained that the goals are broadly similar to the IALO course, including the process to find, fix, track, and target using aircraft. However, the IALO course was targeted at officers working to manage the entire airspace for targeting and strike operations, while the ITC course is delivered directly to the tactical UAS operators and focuses on their tactics, techniques and procedures as well as how they support the process.¹²⁵ The ITCs currently support JOC-I operations by providing coordination and planning for Iraqi ISR assets. CJTF-OIR assessed that the significant increase in sorties by Iraqi ISR assets in support of Iraqi operations is a direct result of the ITC training, in addition to an increased proficiency with ISR coordination and growing experience.¹²⁶

CJTF-OIR said that there are currently no plans for future ITC courses. However, CJTF-OIR believes that as the ITC graduates continue to gain proficiency, they will likely be able in the near future to begin developing their own Iraqi version of the training package to deliver to new members who will be moved to the JOC-I Targeting Cell.¹²⁷

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Last quarter, after several quarters of limited use, the ISF increased its use of field artillery for force protection and to deliberately harass ISIS safe havens.

CJTF-OIR Providing Limited Training for ISF Artillery Unit Trainers

Last quarter, after several quarters of limited use, the ISF increased its use of field artillery for force protection and to deliberately harass ISIS safe havens.¹²⁸ CJTF-OIR said it is currently conducting limited train-the-trainer artillery training for key ISF artillery units.¹²⁹ However, CJTF-OIR stated that Coalition advisors work mainly with their “counterparts” from the JOC-I Fires Team. The principal area of advising, which CJTF-OIR described as also being the most difficult to achieve, is in the use of artillery during operations. The last interactions Coalition advisors had were mostly about the artillery training sessions planned at al-Asad Air Base and about needs for updated maps with Iraqi artillery positions, mapping software, and potential purchase of artillery assets.¹³⁰

Despite establishing a fire support team in the JOC-I in October 2022, CJTF-OIR reported no significant change in use of Iraqi artillery fire support at the JOC-I level.¹³¹ The JOC-I Fires Team, which consists of a brigadier general and a colonel, is not an independent cell inside JOC-I, but rather a part of the JOC-I Targeting Cell.¹³²

During the February planning for Operation Righteous Saber II, the Iraqi Fires Team was not included in the planning process.¹³³ Coalition advisors provided documents to the JOC-I Fires Team to help during the military decision making process, but as they were not solicited, CJTF-OIR said it appears that the ISF did not use them. CJTF-OIR assessed that the JOC-I fire support team does not seem to want to be proactive, and appears only willing to participate in the military decision making process if requested.¹³⁴ This is the same for targeting, as the JOC-I Targeting Cell prefers using air assets to strike ISIS targets instead of using artillery when possible. Coalition advisors regularly pushed the JOC-I Fires Team to be much more proactive and propose the use of artillery in future operations.¹³⁵

CJTF-OIR added that the ISF Artillery Director, although he is not part of the JOC-I, is an important counterpart for advisors to talk with about the needs of training, the needs of equipment, and cooperation with western armies.¹³⁶ Coalition advisors continue to track the equipping process in conjunction with CTEF and OSC-I, including call for fire simulators, lightweight counter-mortar radar, and spare parts.¹³⁷

KURDISH SECURITY FORCES

KSF to Move Forces under the MoPA Command

CJTF-OIR reported that the Kurdish Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) continued to move security personnel from forces aligned with the region’s two main political parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), known as the 80s Unit and the 70s Unit, respectively—into apolitical Regional Guard Brigades (RGB) that operate under the command of the MoPA.¹³⁸ CJTF-OIR reported that the MoPA oversees 20 RGBs, 2 Support Force Commands, 3 Training Centers, and the Ranyia Staff College.¹³⁹

Table 2.

KSF Capability During the Quarter

Function	Capability
Operations	Most operations coordinated with the ISF were conducted by the partisan 70s and 80s forces. Coalition advisors continued to encourage the MoPA to increase KSF activities around the Kurdistan Coordination Line (KCL), an area near the Kurdistan region that is claimed by both the KRG and the Iraqi government.
Intelligence	The KSF made “limited progress” in sharing intelligence with the ISF at the regional and national level, but intelligence-sharing between 70s and 80s forces remained significantly hindered by political tensions between the KDP and PUK. CJTF-OIR reported that the MoPA’s use of intelligence in its planning and decision-making process is “far from perfect.”
Planning	The MoPA’s capability to plan operations remained “underdeveloped.” The Ministry prepared minor plans during the quarter but has not executed them. Long-term planning is hindered by the lack of a budget, lack of a permanent Minister, and lack of experience in planning mechanisms.
Command and Control	The MoPA’s establishment of the 1st and 2nd divisional headquarters marked a “big step forward” for improved command and control of operations. Planning is underway to establish two additional divisions and a Joint Operations Center-Kurdistan that can better coordinate with the KRG and the JOC-I. The headquarters, or Joint Operations Command-Kurdistan (JOC-K), would enable KRG and MoPA leadership to control operations, increase planning support, control the narrative, and better coordinate with the JOC-I and Ministry of Interior. The JOC-K is projected to begin operating next quarter.
Fires	The RGBs and Support Force Commands sometimes use artillery to conduct small scale counter-ISIS operations, but such operations are rare and limited in size, and usually agreed upon in coordination with the ISF, sometimes using the Joint ISF-KSF Coordination Centers. While the Support Force Commands have several artillery battalions at their disposal, artillery exercises are scheduled once or twice a year due to shortages of ammunition.
Sustainment and Logistics	Most KSF sustainment activities occur in support of “framework” operations, such as patrols, not direct counter-ISIS operations. The MoPA recently upgraded the logistics and ammunition warehouses and the regional logistics hubs at Duhok and Suleymaniah, but has struggled to get more of the 70s and 80s units’ vehicles, weapons, ammunition, and stocks into its inventory. Self-sustainability is hampered by the lack of a central multi-year MoPA budget. For large or specialized procurements, the MoPA must request permission from Baghdad and lag-times between requests and the arrival of equipment is 3 to 4 months, and delivery of equipment is not guaranteed.
Information Operations	KSF information operations “continue to progress” but implementation is uneven across the force. KSF units used social media to illustrate important training and operational activities to ensure that their Kurdish audiences were aware of KSF capabilities and professionalism. The KSF still lacks the ability to integrate information operations into its operations against ISIS in a proactive way, lacks target audience analysis, and uses public surveys irregularly.

Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.2 OIR 044 and 23.2 045, 3/23/2023.

Thousands of personnel from the KDP’s 80s Unit and the PUK’s 70s Unit continue to operate under the command of their respective political leaders. CJTF-OIR reported in March 2022 that the 70s Unit force strength was estimated at 40,000 to 45,000 personnel and the 80s Unit was roughly 63,000 to 68,000 personnel.¹⁴⁰ The DIA reported that disagreements between the leaders of the KDP and PUK are “deep and enduring” and that mutual distrust “is probably the greatest single hindrance to the creation of an apolitical military force.”¹⁴¹

On February 7, State and the DoD released nearly identical statements on social media welcoming the KDP and PUK “coming together” in support of MoPA reform initiatives and a 2016 memorandum of understanding, renewed in September 2022, that reiterates U.S. and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) commitments to Peshmerga reform and the Defeat-ISIS campaign in the IKR.¹⁴²

During the quarter, U.S. Government officials, including White House Middle East Coordinator Brett McGurk and Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, met separately with KRG President Nechirvan Barzani to press for progress on the unification of KSF forces.¹⁴³

KSF Demonstrate Improvement but Rely on Coalition

CJTF-OIR reported that KSF under the MoPA did not conduct “named operations”—operations large enough to warrant a campaign name—against ISIS during the quarter.¹⁴⁴ Some of the most effective anti-ISIS capability, including aggressive patrolling, raids, and ambushes, was exhibited by commando units belonging to the political 70s Unit and 80 Units under the command of KRG political parties and by the Zerevani Force, a police unit under the command of the KRG’s Ministry of Interior.¹⁴⁵

CJTF-OIR reported that the KSF under the MoPA remained reliant on Coalition intelligence, ISR, and airstrikes to conduct sustainable and independent ground operations to defeat ISIS. However, KSF units made strides toward self-reliance by using Support Force Command capabilities, such as engineering assets and artillery, which the RGB units do not possess.¹⁴⁶

Coalition advisors continued to engage multiple MoPA directorates and encourage KSF leaders to make necessary reforms. CJTF-OIR reported that the KSF continued to show progress in developing key warfighting functions.¹⁴⁷ (See Table 2.)

ISF-KSF Joint Brigade Still Not Operating

The creation of a joint ISF-KSF brigade remained stalled due to delays in enacting a federal budget.¹⁴⁸ There were no joint ISF-KSF operations, and the ISF and KSF conducted only three coordinated counter-ISIS operations during the quarter. CJTF-OIR reported that it cannot attribute the lack of joint operations to the change in Iraqi government or JOC-I leadership.¹⁴⁹

CJTF-OIR reported that the current government under Prime Minister al-Sudani and the new JOC-I Deputy Commander have publicly stated a desire to form a joint ISF-KSF brigade and have told CJTF-OIR that the joint brigade is an item in Iraq’s FY 2023 federal budget.¹⁵⁰

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Iran-aligned Militias in Iraq Again Target Coalition Installations in Syria, Resume IED Attacks on Contractor Convoys

The DIA reported that Iran-aligned militias continue to pose a threat to U.S. personnel in Iraq.¹⁵¹ This quarter the militias resumed low-level IED attacks against Coalition targets, with front groups claiming seven of eight IED attacks on U.S.-contracted logistics convoys.¹⁵² Before this quarter, the last claimed IED attack on these convoys was in August 2022. The

DIA said that there were no confirmed UAS or indirect fire attacks by Iran-aligned militias on U.S. and Coalition personnel operating in Iraq this quarter. On January 20, Taskhil al-Warithin, a Shia militia front group used by Harakat al-Nujaba based in Iraq, claimed responsibility for a one-way UAS attack on U.S. forces at At Tanf Garrison in southern Syria.¹⁵³

The DIA assessed that the militias maintain the capability to conduct sophisticated attacks against U.S. and Coalition interests. The militias continue to demand that the U.S. withdraw from Iraq and have called on the Iraqi government to renegotiate Iraq's military and economic ties with the United States.¹⁵⁴

CJTF-OIR reported that Iran's political influence and its support to Iran-aligned militia groups restrict U.S. and Coalition freedom of movement in Iraq, which can negatively impact the counter-ISIS mission. Iran provides weapons and training to militias that conduct attacks on the Coalition, which in turn impacts counter-ISIS activities by diminishing operations due to the Coalition having to divert time and resources toward force protection from Iran-aligned militia activities in the region. While Iran uses its influence within the Iraqi government to advocate a U.S. withdrawal, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani has publicly affirmed his support for U.S. and Coalition counter-ISIS activities.¹⁵⁵

The Coalition does not provide support to the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) or its umbrella organization, the Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC), which consists of many of the Iran-aligned militias. CJTF-OIR said that the actions taken by the PMF and PMC generally have little effect on the OIR campaign objectives and the JOC-I recognizes that CJTF-OIR cannot partner with the PMF. Coalition advisors assess that the ISF are able to conduct counter-ISIS operations both with and without the PMF, but are unable to ascertain whether the PMF help or hurt the ISF while conducting counter-ISIS missions.¹⁵⁶

Iran-aligned Militias Further Entrenched in Iraq's New Government

Meanwhile, the Iraqi government's ability to assert control over the PMF or hold its members accountable remains tenuous. According to the DIA, Iraqi Prime Minister al-Sudani is almost certainly refraining from targeting the PMF or causing animosity between the militia groups and the ISF in order to avoid an outbreak of violence as he focuses on more pressing domestic issues. (See page 31.) There was no change to the ISF's continued willingness to follow orders from al-Sudani and the Iraqi government, but this quarter, the ISF was not directed to intervene in disputes involving PMF militias. When protests broke out in the Iraqi town of Baghdeda in mid-March between the local Christian population and the 50th Brigade of the PMF, the ISF remained on the sidelines.¹⁵⁷

The DIA reported that the Shia Coordinating Framework, which includes political parties associated with Iran-aligned militias, focused on gaining further inroads within the Iraqi government this quarter through advancing legislation that would benefit their future prospects, such as the draft three-year budget and the draft election law. Framework-aligned appointments within the ministries continued this quarter, such as the appointment of the Armed Forces deputy chief of staff for administration, who is affiliated with the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq.¹⁵⁸

On January 20, Taskhil al-Warithin, a Shia militia front group used by Harakat al-Nujaba based in Iraq, claimed responsibility for a one-way UAS attack on U.S. forces at At Tanf Garrison in southern Syria.

The PMF: Militias with Growing Political and Financial Arms

According to the DIA, the PMF constitute a “politically effective and formidable force” with combat experience, robust military capabilities, wide-ranging geographic presence, and access to local resources, as well as multifaceted support from Iran. Citing press reporting, the DIA said that the PMF militias are also able to exert influence in Iraq’s judiciary through intimidation tactics and leveraging sympathetic judges. Collectively, each militia is resolute on expelling any U.S. presence from Iraq, though the approach to achieving this goal varies, with most groups supporting a political solution alongside Prime Minister al-Sudani’s government.¹⁵⁹ Citing press reporting and open-source analysis, the DIA provided the following details about how the PMF are organized and operate.

Size and Disposition: PMF institutions respond to an unofficial “Shura Council” dominated by the senior leaders of Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata’ib Hezbollah, the Badr Organization, and other Iran-aligned figures. The DIA, citing an independent study, noted that there are approximately 67 PMF factions comprising about 70,000 pro-Iran militiamen and 40,000 militiamen with various loyalties. Through their affiliation with the Shia Coordinating Framework, the militias and PMF maintain influence within Iraq’s Council of Representatives and ministries, which they leverage to safeguard their interests.¹⁶⁰

Funding: The PMC receives a formal allocation from the national budget, disbursed directly to it by the Finance Ministry via state-owned banks. There has been no change in this allocation because the Iraqi government has yet to pass a 2023 budget. In the previous (2021) budget, the PMC received approximately \$2.2 billion, of which \$70 million was dedicated to procurement. This procurement funding level was uncharacteristically low due to the 2020 global oil price crash.¹⁶¹

Although the Iraqi government does not release official allocations to each militia in its publicly available budget, the DIA assessed that transfers from the central government are a central funding source for individual militias, ensuring their basic financial viability by paying fighters. The government allocates money for member salaries, payments to families of deceased fighters, and weapons and ammunition transfers. Each PMF fighter receives about \$800 per month, and married fighters get about \$922 per month.¹⁶²

Absent government funding, militia financial viability would depend on each group’s unique ability to raise funds through independently managed revenue streams, both illicit and licit, and on the depth of their relationship with Iran, which also provides funding to many of these groups. Across Iraq, militias administer checkpoints (which can earn up to \$100,000 per day) and border crossings, providing them an opportunity to tax and extort travelers and traders. The militias also control wharves at the Umm Qasr Port in southern Iraq, raising money by controlling shipping and facilitating their own imports and exports. Each militia has an associated political arm that aims to win government positions, which provides them favoritism in competing for government-contracted reconstruction projects.¹⁶³ In March, a PMF-owned construction firm, known as the Muhandis General Company, launched its inaugural project after the Iraqi Council of Ministers authorized its establishment with

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The PMF: Militias with Growing Political and Financial Arms *(continued from previous page)*

\$67 million in initial capital.¹⁶⁴ Independent analysts have compared the Muhandis General Company to a similar Iranian company operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that was formed in 1990 and is estimated to have been awarded over \$50 billion in construction contracts.¹⁶⁵

Military Capabilities: The capabilities of each group within the PMC vary greatly, particularly their offensive capabilities, though most groups within the PMC have performed effectively in defensive operations. The groups who carry strong offensive capabilities include Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Badr, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Harakat al-Nujaba, and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, each of which have conducted attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq and are committed to a U.S. withdrawal of forces from Iraq. The DIA explained that indicators it used to assess PMF capabilities include past combat experience against ISIS, support from Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah, provision of ammunition reserves, operation of heavy artillery weapons and main battle tanks, and use of UAS.¹⁶⁶

Turkish Strikes in the IKR Continue

During the quarter, Türkiye continued operations in the IKR against targets associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), carrying out attacks from bases in Türkiye and from bases it maintains in Iraq. The PKK—which the United States, the European Union, and Türkiye consider a terrorist organization—has carried on an insurgency against the Turkish state for several decades; the insurgency is currently headquartered in the IKR.¹⁶⁷

According to news reports, the attacks during the quarter included shelling of PKK bases in Dohuk province and Turkish drone strikes targeting members of the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), a PKK-aligned Iraqi Yazidi armed group in Sinjar, some of whom are also members of the PMC's 80th Brigade.¹⁶⁸

CJTF-OIR reported that the Turkish operations had no effect on the ability of the KSF to conduct operations against ISIS. Additionally, CJTF-OIR said that there was no information to suggest that any troops or resources from planned operations were diverted and no operations were known to have been cancelled or objectives minimized due to Turkish operations. CJTF-OIR said that Turkish activity occurs primarily in the northwest part of the IKR, where there is very limited ISIS presence.¹⁶⁹

State reported that the ongoing conflict between Türkiye and the PKK in Iraq contributes to Iraq's instability, and that the United States has urged Türkiye to “coordinate more closely” with Iraq authorities on “cross-border military operations against terrorist targets to avoid harm to civilians.”¹⁷⁰ The Turkish defense ministry asserts that it coordinates its operations with the Iraqi authorities, according to a press account.¹⁷¹ The Iraqi government has complained about Ankara's incursions, but has little authority in the IKR according to a Western press agency, and the KSF does “not have the firepower to challenge the PKK, despite seeing it as a potent and populist rival.”¹⁷² Analysts and Kurdish officials say that Türkiye's presence gives Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq “a pretext” to rebrand themselves as the resistance against the Turkish presence and gives Iran an excuse to step up its own military activities within Iraq.¹⁷³

Diplomatic Operations Update

Since 2019, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, and the U.S. Consulate General Erbil—collectively known as Mission Iraq—have operated under a cap on direct-hire personnel. The cap was lifted in March.¹⁷⁴ A recent Comprehensive Staffing Review, provided by Mission Iraq, and State’s Overseas Presence Review resulted in recommendations for additional positions.¹⁷⁵ State said that the recommendations themselves will not result in additional positions but rather inform on “best” staffing compositions.¹⁷⁶

The embassy reported that there were very few instances when embassy staff were unable to meet with the new Iraqi government leadership and that opportunities to meet with Iraqi officials during the quarter were at an “all-time high” since Iraq’s new government was formed in October 2022.¹⁷⁷ State attributed the frequency of these engagements to the new government’s accessibility and the increase in stability and security in Baghdad and throughout Iraq.¹⁷⁸

However, State said threats to Mission Iraq remain largely unchanged from the previous quarter, including the potential for UAS attacks and indirect fire from mortars and rockets. The possibility of sudden civil unrest in Baghdad, including the international zone where the embassy is located, remained constant.¹⁷⁹

SOME EMBASSY CONSULAR SERVICES RESUME

State reported that the embassy resumed nonimmigrant visa services to the general public and limited immigrant services in February. Immigrant visa, nonimmigrant visa, and routine citizen services were curbed following a December 2019 attack on the embassy. The embassy is adjudicating a backlog of immigrant visa applications that were in process before the 2019 attack. Nonimmigrant visa applicants at the embassy face a wait time for interviews because of limited consular staffing. The U.S. Consulate General in Erbil continued to process nonimmigrant visas through much of this period, though applicants face long wait time there as well.¹⁸⁰

CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW CONSULATE COMPOUND IN ERBIL FACES CHALLENGES

The U.S. Consulate General in Erbil reported that construction of the new consulate compound is 82 percent complete.¹⁸¹ The original awarded construction contract was \$422 million and the current contract with modifications is \$457 million. State said the construction value is only part of the overall cost of doing a project, which also includes design, furniture, telephones, and onsite construction and security supervision. State’s Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations has estimated that with additional modifications total expenditures will be close to the total project budget of \$795 million, as notified to Congress.¹⁸²

The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations said it has been working to add desks, housing, and a firing range to the contract, in response to a formal request by the embassy in February 2021. The request was in response to memoranda from the Bureau of Diplomatic Security to Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations submitted in May and August 2021. The added requirements have posed challenges to completing the compound. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations said it is difficult to make the requested changes this far into a project, but the construction team now has an execution plan and is working to hit key milestones.¹⁸³

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Diplomatic Operations Update *(continued from previous page)*

During the quarter, the KRG began implementing a policy requiring private sector employers to limit foreign workers to 25 percent of their workforce, according to an immigration-services firm.¹⁸⁴ State said that the new KRG policy will impact the project's contractor, which has relied heavily on third-country laborers to execute the project. As of the end of the quarter, it remained unclear if the contractor would be able to retain its foreign staff. There also may be a cost impact, either due to "fines" or potential loss of productivity, if the number of third-country nationals is limited.¹⁸⁵



Rendering of the New U.S. Consulate Compound in Erbil. (State image)

POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

The U.S. Government, through State, coordinates diplomacy and public diplomacy programs to support Iraq's stability and enable reconstruction. State said that this engagement is necessary to combat malign foreign influence, particularly from Iran. The U.S. Government also supports Iraqi efforts to ensure a more responsive government and reduce corruption; foster private sector-led economic growth and job creation; and strengthen civil society groups so that they can operate freely.¹⁸⁶

GOVERNANCE

According to State, Prime Minister Muhammed Shia al-Sudani has committed to an ambitious reform agenda. The agenda includes many commitments made by previous Iraqi governments, such as increasing Iraq's energy independence and power generation, combatting climate change, rooting out corruption, and increasing respect for human rights. While it remains to be seen whether Prime Minister al-Sudani can fully deliver on these promises, the United States has publicly and privately signaled support for his reform agenda.¹⁸⁷

Iraq is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change and is already experiencing many of its worst impacts. Despite being rich in energy resources, Iraq needs to improve its energy infrastructure and capture flared gas in order to generate enough

electricity to provide continuous power for its citizens. It is facing an acute water crisis and a lack of jobs for young Iraqis, roughly 35 percent of whom are unemployed. Respect for human rights appears to be generally backsliding, including in the IKR. Endemic corruption remains a major problem. State says the onus is on the Iraqi government to enact bold policies and reforms that concretely improve lives and reinforce democratic values and good governance.¹⁸⁸

In mid-February, the Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Fuad Hussein led an Iraqi government delegation to the United States and co-chaired a meeting of the Higher Coordinating Committee with Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, in accordance with the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement. A joint statement released after the meeting noted that it was the first Higher Coordinating Committee meeting focused on economic cooperation, energy sector development, and climate change. In addition, the delegations discussed Iraq's water crisis. The United States said it plans to continue its technical assistance to improve Iraq's water management practices.¹⁸⁹

Throughout March, Iraqis protested in Baghdad and in southern Iraq against a proposed law that would revert the country's electoral system to the Sainte-Lague party-list proportional representation system, which Iraq used in the 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections. The system was changed by the Iraqi parliament to a single nontransferable vote system for the 2021 election in response to the violent protests that began in October 2019.¹⁹⁰ According to a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, a return to the Sainte-Lague proportional representation system will make it difficult for independents and small party candidates to win parliamentary seats, reversing the hard-fought gains won by the October 2019 protestors and demonstrators.¹⁹¹

The Iraqi Commission of Integrity, an independent commission responsible for investigating corruption in the Iraqi government, reported that in January the Iraqi courts issued arrest warrants for 90 former and current senior Iraqi government officials and secured convictions in 117 other cases against government officials.

Iraq Seeks to Combat Synthetic Drug Market

Iraq has a growing problem with the smuggling, manufacturing, and use of synthetic drugs, particularly crystal methamphetamine and Captagon, an amphetamine-like stimulant that is a popular recreational drug in the Middle East. State said that the Iraqi government's capability to interdict or disrupt drug smuggling varies depending on which unit of the Border Guards is operating along the border. The Iraqi government's attempts to stop consumption of synthetic drugs consists of imposing harsh penalties for use, while providing little or no medical support or treatment options.¹⁹²

In March, a media source reported that Iraqi authorities said they had seized 3 million Captagon pills. One drug analysis publication reported that ISIS and other violent extremist groups have used Captagon pills to enhance fighters' abilities.¹⁹³

Iraq Continues Anti-Corruption Efforts

The Iraqi Commission of Integrity, an independent commission responsible for investigating corruption in the Iraqi government, reported that in January the Iraqi courts issued arrest warrants for 90 former and current senior Iraqi government officials and secured convictions in 117 other cases against government officials. In February, the courts issued arrest warrants for 43 former and current senior officials and secured convictions in 174 other cases.¹⁹⁴

In early March, an Iraqi court issued arrest warrants for four senior officials who served in Iraq's previous government for their alleged involvement in the theft of \$2.5 billion in funds from an Iraqi government bank account, according to State. The accused are former finance minister Ali Allawi and three top aides to former Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.¹⁹⁵ According to a media report, former Prime Minister al-Kadhimi called the arrest warrants of Ali Allawi and associates a “witch-hunt.”¹⁹⁶ One analyst characterized the warrant for Ali Allawi as “madness,” and said the men were targeted for having uncovered the \$2.5 billion theft.¹⁹⁷

Separately, according to a media report, an Iraqi court convicted the former Minister of Transportation, Kazem al-Hamami, on corruption charges in absentia and sentenced him to “maximum imprisonment.”¹⁹⁸ According to the report, the Commission of Integrity said al-Hamami had tampered with contracts and tenders in support of numerous contractors and suppliers.¹⁹⁹ In addition, the Commission of Integrity reported an Iraqi court sentenced an official of Rafidain Bank to 15 years in prison and fined him \$10 million for embezzlement.²⁰⁰

ECONOMY

Proposed 2023 Budget Projects \$49.3 Billion Deficit

On March 13, Prime Minister al-Sudani's cabinet approved a draft 2023 budget of \$152.8 billion, \$63.1 billion more than the 2021 budget, which was the last budget approved by the Iraqi parliament.²⁰¹ The proposed budget will result in an estimated \$49.3 billion deficit per year, according to media reports. The estimated budget deficit in 2021 was \$19.8 billion.²⁰² The draft budget includes provisions that would govern the proceeds from oil extracted in the IKR and the KRG's share of the annual budget. It also includes the framework for the 2024 and 2025 budgets.²⁰³ Until the 2023 budget is approved by the Iraqi parliament, the government will continue to operate under the 2021 budget.²⁰⁴

According to a media report, the proposed budget would set the KRG's share of the budget at 12.67 percent, a level established by the 2019 budget, which would resolve a major disagreement between the KRG and the federal government. According to the report, a joint account will be established for the income from the estimated 400,000 barrels per day of oil exported from the IKR; however, no agreement has been reached on who will control the account.²⁰⁵

The cabinet also approved the transfer of \$308 million to the KRG less than 2 months after Iraq's Federal Supreme Court struck down an earlier attempt to transfer \$125 million to the KRG, ruling that the payment violated the 2021 budget law.²⁰⁶

According to one report, the draft budget estimates Iraq will generate revenues of \$245 million per day from the sale of 3.5 million barrels at \$70 per barrel—a projection that, on average, is well below the actual average daily revenues in 2022. (See Figure 5.)

Türkiye halted oil exports from the IKR following a March 23 ruling by the International Chamber of Commerce on a lawsuit brought by Iraq against Türkiye for receiving “unilateral” crude oil exports by pipeline from the IKR to Türkiye's port in Ceyhan.²⁰⁷ According to a media report, the pipeline shutdown affects roughly 400,000 barrels of oil exported daily from

In early March, an Iraqi court issued arrest warrants for four senior officials who served in Iraq's previous government for their alleged involvement in the theft of \$2.5 billion in funds from an Iraqi government bank account, according to State.

Figure 5.

Actual vs. Projected Daily Oil Revenue, in \$ Millions, January 2022–March 2023

the IKR and 75,000 barrels per day exported from the rest of Iraq. The ruling is a blow to the KRG’s goal of controlling the sale of oil extracted in the IKR, and it calls into question the status of oil production companies operating in the Kurdistan region.²⁰⁸

IRAQI KURDISTAN REGION

Tension Flare between Iraqi Kurdistan’s Two Main Political Parties

Tensions between the two main Iraqi Kurdish factions, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), continued during the quarter. According to journalists and other observers, disunity among Iraqi Kurds made it more difficult to resolve differences within KRG and with the Iraqi government. Some observers described the split between the KDP and PUK as creating “dual administrations,” in which there are KDP-controlled zones (centered in Erbil) and PUK-controlled zones (centered in Sulaymaniyah).²⁰⁹

Rhetoric between the two sides was heated during the quarter. In mid-January, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani (KDP) said that a key issue remained what he called the October 2022 “terrorist assassination” of a PUK intelligence official who had defected to the KDP. The prime minister added that it was unacceptable for the PUK to be part of the KRG but at the same time acting as an opposition party, according to a media report.²¹⁰ In response, KRG

Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talibani (PUK) said that Prime Minister Barzani had led “the worst cabinet in the history of governance” in the IKR according to PUK-affiliated media.²¹¹

Tensions between the ruling Kurdish parties raised U.S. concern because of their negative impact on the fight against ISIS and the ability of Iran to spread its influence by capitalizing on the disputes, according to a media report. One analyst cited in the report said that only the United States is an “acceptable” mediator to both the KDP and PUK to help prevent a further rise in tensions.²¹² However, at the time of Prime Minister al-Sudani’s visit to the IKR in mid-March, a PUK official told an Iraqi media source that he hoped the prime minister would play a proactive role in resolving the issues between the PUK and KDP, adding that he would be “better than foreign mediation in resolving the crisis in the IKR.”²¹³

Coinciding with the KDP-PUK tensions is rising economic and political dissatisfaction among Iraqi Kurds, which threatens to undercut and weaken the KRG. An opinion poll conducted in late January by an Erbil-based research firm found that slightly over half of those interviewed thought they would be better off if the KRG were dissolved, and central authority was returned to the federal government. This is a reversal from 6 years ago when 92.7 percent of voters in the 2017 independence referendum voted in favor of seceding from Iraq.²¹⁴

IKR Election Date Announced

The office of the IKR president announced on March 26 that the IKR would hold legislative elections on November 18, more than a year after they were postponed due to disagreements over how to distribute “quota seats” among ethnic and religious minorities, according to media reports.²¹⁵ However, according to one report, the election law has not been amended and disagreement over seat allocation continues.²¹⁶

According to press reports, the parties agreed the IKR would be divided into four electoral districts—one per province—and that voting would be based on the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission’s biometric voter registration system. The parties reportedly agreed to use a hybrid system, wherein half of the candidates would be selected from open lists and half through closed lists, with the total number of seats for each electoral district based on data provided by the Iraqi government’s Ministry of Trade. Finally, the parties reportedly agreed to reactivate the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission and fill the two vacancies on the commission.²¹⁷

REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

The United States encourages and supports Iraq’s efforts to expand its diplomatic presence, increase its capacity to uphold its sovereignty, build relationships with its Middle East and regional neighbors, and oppose the current level of negative Iranian influence within Iraq.²¹⁸

Al-Sudani Seeks Good Relations with Regional Neighbors

During the quarter, the Iraqi government under Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani continued to prioritize his predecessor’s policy of good relations with Iraq’s neighbors, according to State.²¹⁹ According to an analyst at a United Kingdom-based think tank, Prime Minister al-Sudani appears to be planning a balanced foreign policy with a nuanced approach to Iran.²²⁰

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On March 10, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China issued a joint statement announcing the resumption of the Iran-Saudi diplomatic relationship and reopening embassies.

In February, Prime Minister al-Sudani met with UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi. Later that month, Iraqi and Kuwaiti officials met to discuss their maritime boundary. In March, Prime Minister al-Sudani met President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo to discuss economic cooperation and security, and regional issues, including their cooperation with Jordan.²²¹

On March 10, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China issued a joint statement announcing the resumption of the Iran-Saudi diplomatic relationship and reopening embassies.²²² According to a media report, the agreement followed a week of talks in China between delegations from Saudi Arabia and Iran that were sponsored by China's President Xi Jinping. The Iraqi government welcomed the agreement, according to a media report.²²³ Since 2021, Iraq had sponsored five joint meetings in Baghdad between Iran and Saudi Arabia as a way to stabilize their relationship.²²⁴ The agreement was also hailed by regional neighbors Oman, Qatar, Jordan, and Türkiye.²²⁵

Iraq also hosted the Gulf Cup, a soccer tournament with regional participation, in Basrah in January. The tournament showcased Iraq's desire, willingness, and openness to integrate with its Arab neighbors, State said.²²⁶

Russia's Foreign Minister Visits Baghdad

On February 5, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrived in Baghdad for a series of talks with Iraqi officials on energy, stability, and food security in view of the Ukraine conflict. According to State, Lavrov led a large delegation of oil and gas company representatives.²²⁷ Media reported that Lavrov met with Iraq's top four officials, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein, Prime Minister al-Sudani, President Abdul Latif Rashid, and Council of Representatives Speaker Mohammed al-Halbusi. Lavrov discussed Iraqi debts owed to Russian oil companies, which Iraq is withholding due to U.S. sanctions placed on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. In addition, they discussed security and stability in the region and Iraq's view on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.²²⁸

State reported that the United States underscored to Iraqi government officials the reality of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine and the need for Iraq, a country that supports democracy and the United Nations charter, to stand up for those values. On February 23, Iraq voted in favor of a UN resolution calling for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine.²²⁹

China Expands Footprint in Iraq's Oil Sector

On February 21, Prime Minister al-Sudani's cabinet gave final approval to a fifth bid round involving five gas fields and one oil field. This bid round had been stalled since 2018. Two Chinese companies, Geo Jade and United Energy Group, were among those awarded licenses. As a result of the bid round, the Chinese share of potential future oil and gas production in Iraq rose from 8 percent to 27 percent; Western-based companies control 49 percent. State reported that Iraq does not have an export infrastructure for gas, so gas produced from these projects will be used domestically—potentially replacing Iranian gas and facilitating the expansion of Iraq's electricity generation capacity.²³⁰

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Alina L. Romanowski attends the opening of the Ninewa Medical Fluids Factory, which will allow Iraq to produce critical medical supplies rather than spending hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to import them. (UNDP photo)



STABILIZATION

The U.S. Government seeks a stable Iraq capable of suppressing insurgencies and violent extremist organizations at the local government and law enforcement levels. The U.S. Government funds programs that seek to accelerate the restoration of essential services in conflict-affected areas of Iraq. In addition, the U.S. Government assists ethnic and religious minority communities and supports programs that help displaced persons return with dignity, safely, and voluntarily to their places of origin or settle in other destinations of their choosing.²³¹

USAID reported that it supported stabilization activities through 11 active programs during the quarter funded by USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives and Middle East Bureau, including the Safe Return Program for IDPs in Ninewa province, which ended during the quarter.²³² (See Table 3.) Funds obligated in FY 2021 for these programs totaled nearly \$82 million. USAID implementers briefly paused some stabilization programming in northern Iraq following earthquakes in Syria and Iraq in order to assess potential damage.²³³

Table 3.

USAID-funded Stabilization Programs in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activities
<p>Funding Facility for Stabilization Aims to stabilize areas recently liberated from ISIS by restoring damaged or destroyed essential services and providing the conditions for a dignified, safe, and voluntary return of IDPs to their home.</p> <p>July 2015–December 2023 FY 2021 funding: \$36,000,000</p>	<p>USAID is the largest contributor to this 29-donor, multilateral program.</p>
<p>Durable Communities and Economic Opportunities Aims to build resilient, adaptive communities and advance economic well-being in target communities in Iraq by addressing underlying drivers of conflict and increasing community leadership of inclusive local development.</p> <p>June 2020–September 2025 (including two option years) FY 2021 funding: \$4,000,000</p>	<p>Engaged selected communities impacted by conflict and their leadership to identify and resolve conflict sustainably and peacefully through inclusive dialogue and practical solutions.</p> <p>Provided training and networking services to Iraqi victims of war to help them gain high-quality and sustainable sources of livelihood.</p>

Program	Activities
<p>Shared Future Supports the durable return for IDPs from the Ninewa Plain, focusing on religious and ethnic minority communities. June 2018–September 2023 FY 2021 funding: \$6,815,321</p>	<p>Worked with youth, community, and religious leaders to increase mutual understanding, tolerance, and trust both within their communities and with other communities. Improved vocational and leadership skills and youth livelihood opportunities through targeted vocational training.</p>
<p>Iraq Response and Resilience Program Supports vulnerable people in areas suffering from limited resources as a result of natural or other disasters, such as acute pollution, to ensure every Iraqi has safe access to water, electricity, health, education, free movement on sealed roads and civil/municipal services, and the opportunity to support their family financially. September 2019–December 2023 FY 2021 funding: \$0</p>	<p>Rehabilitated nine water treatment units in Basrah that will provide over 640,000 beneficiaries with potable water.</p>
<p>Supporting the Vulnerable Populations in Iraq September 2018–September 2023 FY 2021 funding: \$10,000,000</p>	<p>Supported the return of displaced populations from ethnic and religious minorities in Ninewa Plain and western Ninewa through activities related to livelihoods, housing, community peacebuilding, education, and psychosocial services.</p>
<p>Transitional Assistance to IDPs in Erbil, Iraq Assists vulnerable IDP families with immediate household needs, such as shelter and food, and ease their return home when possible. September 13, 2019–September 30, 2023 FY 2021 funding: \$600,000</p>	<p>Provided cash assistance to support the IDPs from Ninewa province in protracted displacement in Erbil and assisted beneficiaries to prepare for durable solutions for their families through targeted information and planning sessions.</p>
<p>Strengthening the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee to Response to Communities in Crisis Supports building the capacity of the committee while responding to the ongoing needs of IDPs in Iraq through institutional capacity-building and organizational development. October 1, 2020–September 30, 2024 FY 2021 funding: \$1,000,000</p>	<p>Strengthened the capacity of the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee and prepared it to fully engage with USAID on future development initiatives through strengthened capacity and commitment.</p>
<p>Building Resilience in Children Leverages Ahlan Simsim’s unique approach that combines locally driven, crisis-sensitive and age-appropriate interventions to increase resilience capacities among children, families, and communities impacted by conflict and violence. July 1, 2021–June 30, 2024 FY 2022 Funding: \$5,000,000</p>	<p>Engaged families and communities impacted by conflict and violence using a combination of original multimedia, direct services, and youth engagement programming to increase resilience capacities that help to counter malign influences and prevent radicalization to violence and violent extremism.</p>

Program	Activities
<p>Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Minority Communities in Iraq Aims to contribute to communal healing, intercommunal understanding, and appreciation of the diversity of Iraq, a fundamental step toward the promotion and actualization of democracy. May 12, 2021–May 11, 2023 FY 2021 Funding: \$0</p>	<p>Partnered with local Iraqi organizations to describe and document the tangible and intangible heritage of religious and ethnic minority communities in Iraq.</p> <p>Created digitally documented collections as databases, built for portability, interoperability, and accessibility.</p>
<p>Iraq Community Resilience Initiative II ICRI Phase II provides direct assistance to Iraqi partners to empower inclusive civic action with the goal of supporting a prosperous and inclusive Iraq. This is achieved by improving positive perceptions of civic engagement among Iraqis and increasing community mobilization around national causes. FY 2021 funding: \$18,500,000</p>	<p>Supporting increased positive perceptions of civic engagement</p> <p>Supporting increased community mobilization around national causes</p> <p>Supporting dialogue between citizens and elected officials, as well as cultural and social spaces that foster engagement and interaction among diverse community members.</p> <p>Highlighted commonalities that foster unity and a shared identity across Iraq, including in new community spaces south of Baghdad such as Nasiriya, Basra Center, Islah, and al-Madina.</p>

Source: USAID Middle East Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/15/2023.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The UN Humanitarian Needs Overview for Iraq reported that 2.5 million Iraqis are in need of humanitarian assistance, a 39 percent decrease from the 4.1 million people in need in 2021.²³⁴ While more than 81 percent of the 6 million Iraqis displaced since 2014 have returned to their places of origin, 1.2 million Iraqis remain internally displaced.²³⁵ In February, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published the Humanitarian Transition Overview for Iraq, which described the extent to which Iraqis’ lack access to basic services (such as health, water, sanitation, and hygiene, and education) and lack of income to sustain daily living impacts livelihoods and food security.²³⁶

USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) provided nearly \$6 million in FY 2023 in support of emergency food assistance programming for internally displaced persons, refugees, and other crisis-affected people in Iraq.²³⁷ A USAID BHA-funded program that supported needs assessments and information management for the humanitarian community in Iraq concluded on February 28.²³⁸ A separate award to the World Food Programme in support of their emergency food assistance program targeting Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDP) and Syrian refugees in camps also concluded on February 28.²³⁹ (See Tables 5 and 6.)

Table 4.

U.S. Humanitarian Funding for the Iraq Regional Crisis Response in FY 2023

Agency	
USAID BHA	\$5,959,200
State PRM	\$0
TOTAL	\$5,959,200

Source: USAID, “Iraq Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #323,” 3/13/2023.

Table 5.

State PRM-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Implementer	Activity Highlights
<p>International Organization for Migration Provides a comprehensive response to the humanitarian needs of migrants, IDPs, returnees, and host communities.</p>	<p>Worked to improve the conditions for dignified and voluntary returns to areas of origin, local integration, and settlement in new locations, with assistance on civil documentation and legal issues, social cohesion support, financial assistance, health consultations, and protection monitoring and advocacy.</p> <p>Through the Displacement Tracking Matrix, collected data on displacement, conditions in areas of return, and main barriers to return for IDPs and returnees.</p>
<p>UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) Promotes and protects the rights of refugees and other displaced persons, provides assistance, and seek durable solutions.</p>	<p>Led the humanitarian response for Syrian refugees in Iraq in close coordination with humanitarian actors and government authorities, to protect and assist refugees and asylum-seekers.</p> <p>Supported activities for refugees, IDPs, and persons at risk of statelessness related to registration and civil documentation; protection monitoring and advocacy; legal aid; health; shelter and camp management; psychosocial support; child protection; prevention, risk mitigation, and response to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse; among other services.</p>
<p>Other International Organizations Support refugees, IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable communities in Iraq with a range of humanitarian assistance and services.</p>	<p>Provided services to refugees, IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable communities including support for health, mental health & psychosocial support, legal assistance, shelter, prevention and response to gender-based violence and child protection issues, among other services.</p>
<p>NGOs–Education Increases access to education for displaced children.</p>	<p>Supported education services for displaced school-aged children, which is a key need for refugee, IDP, and returnee families. Provided educational kits and materials, incentivized volunteer teachers, conducted service referrals, implemented trainings for teachers, and led targeted, evidence-based advocacy around inclusive education.</p>
<p>NGOs–Livelihoods and Economic Empowerments Helps refugees, IDPs and returnees develop or restore income-generating and livelihoods opportunities.</p>	<p>Supported the restoration of income-generating and livelihoods opportunities, including building the capacity of the local government and institutions to provide services in the agricultural sector, trainings to develop key business knowledge and skills, cash grants for enterprise start-ups, and legal assistance services with livelihoods interventions to support beneficiaries' access to income.</p>
<p>NGOs–Protection Reduces risks for refugees and IDPs and promote their empowerment to exercise rights and access services.</p>	<p>Supported protection activities to reduce risk for refugees and IDPs, including gender-based violence prevention and response activities, legal assistance and awareness-raising to remove legal barriers to durable solutions for displacement-affected individuals, case management, mental health and psychosocial support services, child protection and child safeguarding training, and support for community centers and Women & Girls Safe Spaces.</p>

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 3/17/2023.

Table 6.

USAID-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Implementer	Activity Highlights
Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene USAID BHA-funded Implementing Partner	Provided water trucking services to 11,353 individuals, solid waste management services to 57,173 individuals, desludging services benefiting 41,301 individuals, and continued regular operations and maintenance of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities for 41,584 individuals in camps and collective centers. Delivered hygiene promotion activities for 76,906 individuals in camps and collective centers. Developed technical packages for three water treatment plants and five reverse osmosis restoration projects in coordination with Iraqi Department of Water engineers.
Protection USAID BHA-funded Implementing Partner	Reached 27 individuals through community-based child protection activities and 208 children through a psychosocial support program. Graduated 113 caregivers from a positive parenting program. Delivered awareness sessions on child labor to 2,278 individuals. Provided comprehensive gender-based violence case management services to 63 individuals and psycho-social support to approximately 400 individuals. Opened 307 legal cases (and closed 170 legal cases) on matters related to family law, civil documentation, and housing, land, and property rights. Provided legal assistance to 366 clients in Salah al Din.

Source: USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/16/2023.

Note: Activity highlights are illustrative examples and do not represent the full spectrum of USAID BHA activities conducted during the quarter. As a part of the U.S. Government response, USAID BHA funding also supports health, protection, and shelter and settlements programs for vulnerable populations in conflict-affected areas of Iraq.

TRANSITION TO IRAQI ADMINISTRATION

Iraqi Government Assumes Control of Some Humanitarian Assistance as Part of UN Plan

The international community is in the process of transferring humanitarian response operations to the Iraqi government and KRG as part of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. This transition reflects Iraq's decreasing humanitarian needs and the increased ability and resources of the Iraqi government.²⁴⁰

The United Nations recently altered its efforts in Iraq to emphasize development initiatives that seek to serve all Iraqis instead of the previous humanitarian response plan that focused primarily on those affected by the conflict with ISIS.²⁴¹ According to the UN Humanitarian Country Team, these development strategies are more effective to address Iraq's priority needs, which the UN identified as: 1) livelihoods support/employment; 2) shelter/housing; 3) healthcare; 4) food; and 5) the need to repay debt.²⁴²

International donor funding for humanitarian assistance in Iraq has decreased in recent years and is anticipated to continue to decline in future years due to the emergence of severe crises in other countries.²⁴³ The Iraqi government has additional resources available due to revenue from high oil prices.²⁴⁴ In addition, the Iraqi Emergency Law for Food Security

According to USAID BHA, the Iraqi government has ostensibly taken over humanitarian coordination from the UN in some sectors, including education; health; and water, sanitation, and hygiene.

and Development, approved in June 2022, increased the government’s ability to respond to Iraqi needs.²⁴⁵

According to USAID BHA, the Iraqi government has ostensibly taken over humanitarian coordination from the UN in some sectors, including education; health; and water, sanitation, and hygiene. However, these coordination structures were nascent and only functional to varying degrees.²⁴⁶ In most cases there are separate coordination groups for federal Iraq and the IKR.²⁴⁷ Coordination for other sectors is still led largely by international partners.²⁴⁸ In the IKR, the General Directorate of Water and Sewage has taken over some water, sanitation, and hygiene activities in many IDP camps, specifically desludging and trash collection, but services are not delivered with the same frequency or to the same standards as when delivered by humanitarian organizations. USAID BHA reported that some progress had been made in expanding the mandate of Department of Labor and Social Affairs caseworkers to include child protection, and capacity building efforts are ongoing to hand over protection, health, and other services.²⁴⁹

In February, OCHA identified humanitarian needs that the Iraqi government and development organizations were not fully prepared to address in 2023, and defined priorities for UN programming and fundraising.²⁵⁰ In particular, the Iraqi government is unwilling or unable to assume responsibility for humanitarian services in formal and informal IDP sites, including health services for in-camp IDPs, support for IDPs to transition to sustainable livelihoods, child protection services, education for IDP children, and shelter assistance for IDPs, particularly those who are most vulnerable.²⁵¹

USAID BHA said that the priority concern with the transition of humanitarian assistance is that the decrease in internationally-funded humanitarian services has not been met with an equivalent, or even near-equivalent, increase in services from the government.²⁵² While some progress has been made in identifying the Iraqi government offices and platforms that will assume functions previously conducted by the UN, major questions and gaps remain in terms of government capacity and commitment towards coordination, funding, and the focus of newly formed operating offices and platforms.²⁵³ The Iraqi government’s FY 2023 budget, after approval by parliament, will be one indicator of its humanitarian priorities, as a lack of funding within ministries is often a major impediment to those ministries taking over the provision of services.²⁵⁴ Separately, the Iraqi government continued to push for camp closures, although formal camp populations still face significant barriers to returning to their areas of origin.²⁵⁵

Most USAID BHA-funded humanitarian activities will continue through the end of FY 2023, at which point, many but not all activities will end due to a lack of funding.²⁵⁶ In FY 2024, USAID BHA anticipates that international funding, including BHA funding, will continue for many protection activities, although with less funding and covering a smaller geographic area.²⁵⁷ Health and water, sanitation, and hygiene services in IDP camps and informal settlements will also be supported by international donors but with less funding, resulting in fewer beneficiaries of assistance, or reduced services, or both.²⁵⁸ While donors, including USAID, will continue to advocate for the government to take on the provision of services for those populations currently serviced by humanitarian programs, Iraqi government support may decrease as donor support decreases.²⁵⁹

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

NGOs Experienced Increased Delays in Securing Access Letters Due to Iraqi Government Requirements

USAID reported that the Iraqi government introduced a new process to request permits (known as “access letters”) to operate in certain parts of Iraq.²⁶⁰ In January and February, some non-governmental organizations (NGO) faced increased delays in securing access letters because the Department of Non-governmental Organization (DNGO) required them to submit proof of income tax payments with their access letter requests and, in some cases, written pledges stating that the NGOs would bear the legal and financial consequences resulting from any legal violations, including tax or customs compliance failures.²⁶¹ With assistance from an NGO coordinating body that serves as an intermediary between the DNGO and the NGO community, NGOs were able to negotiate a 3-month grace period for submitting proof of tax documents.²⁶² This grace period has helped reduce the time it takes for NGOs to request and the DNGO to issue the access letters.²⁶³

One USAID BHA NGO implementer reported difficulties accessing certain areas of the Kirkuk governorate, where checkpoints were manned by federal police instead of the Iraqi army. The police required the NGO to use security escorts, which the NGO refused.²⁶⁴ The NGO was ultimately able to access project locations and avoided any disruption to its activities.²⁶⁵

The Iraqi government repatriated 142 households comprising 580 individuals from al-Hol on January 14 and 154 households comprising 581 individuals on February 26.

REPATRIATION

Repatriations from al-Hol and Detention Centers Resume

During the quarter, the pace of Iraqi repatriations from the al-Hol displacement camp and SDF detention centers in Syria resumed after a brief suspension during November and December.²⁶⁶ The Iraqi government repatriated 142 households comprising 580 individuals from al-Hol on January 14 and 154 households comprising 581 individuals on February 26. A total of 1,219 Iraqi households comprising 4,903 individuals have been repatriated from al-Hol since May 2021. State commended the Iraqi government on the repatriations it has done so far and offered to continue their joint efforts to expedite returns for the approximately 26,000 Iraqis who remain in the camp. Iraq also repatriated about 100 Iraqi detainees from SDF detention centers during the quarter.²⁶⁷

Both State PRM and USAID BHA provide humanitarian assistance and services in the Jeddah 1 camp, where repatriated Iraqis live pending reintegration. This support includes camp management services; mental health and psychosocial support, including counseling, vocational training, resocialization, and soft skills building programs; and protection assistance, including counseling and support for survivors of gender-based violence.²⁶⁸ The U.S. Government closely coordinates with the UN Technical Working Group for the Implementation of the Global Framework for Iraqi Returnees from Syria and continues to follow up on the latest needs in the repatriation and reintegration process.²⁶⁹

During the quarter, IDPs consistently listed insufficient shelter, insecurity, and lack of assurance that they will be safe in their communities, a lack of livelihoods, difficulty obtaining civil documentation, and a lack of basic services as obstacles to their return, according to State PRM.

State PRM and USAID provide support to supports residents at the Jeddah 1 camp, where Iraqis first arrive after repatriation. Through the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), State PRM provides legal services to obtain civil documents; housing, land, and property rights; and support to the primary health clinic in Jeddah 1, which provides comprehensive primary and referral healthcare services for its residents.²⁷⁰ The International Organization for Migration reported that 569 households (2,277 individuals) were residing at Jeddah 1 during the quarter.²⁷¹

State PRM also supports Iraqis after they leave Jeddah 1 and complete the return and reintegration process.²⁷² Through International Organization for Migration, State PRM supports services for Jeddah 1 residents as they transition to their areas of return, including protection monitoring and follow up with returnees, reintegration grants, and livelihoods support.²⁷³ Full reintegration of repatriated Iraqis is often delayed by the Iraqi government's lengthy security review process.²⁷⁴

During the quarter, IDPs consistently listed insufficient shelter, insecurity, and lack of assurance that they will be safe in their communities, a lack of livelihoods, difficulty obtaining civil documentation, and a lack of basic services as obstacles to their return, according to State PRM. Most individuals affected by displacement were living on daily wages, and restrictions on movement have significantly affected their ability to make ends meet. Furthermore, many IDPs are at high risk of secondary displacement.²⁷⁵

State PRM reported that it assists the 26 IDP camps in the IKR through a variety of mechanisms, including multinational contributions to UN agencies and NGOs, direct and indirect assistance and coordination of assistance by KRG and federal Iraq entities, and private donations. State PRM and USAID BHA support NGOs and international organizations supporting displaced persons in IDP camps and camp management.²⁷⁶







The February earthquakes damaged a mosque in Aleppo, Syria, a city already ravaged by conflict. (WFP photo)

SYRIA

50 Security

65 Stabilization

71 Humanitarian Assistance

SYRIA

In Syria, the U.S. Government seeks conditions in which an ISIS resurgence is prevented and northeastern Syria is stable and secure.²⁷⁷ Core U.S. Government policy priorities in Syria include supporting the enduring defeat of ISIS, supporting ceasefires across the country, the expansion of humanitarian access, accountability for the Syrian regime’s atrocities and respect for international law and human rights, and a political process led by Syrians under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.²⁷⁸

SECURITY

To achieve its mission in Syria, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) works with vetted local partner forces, including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeastern Syria and the Syrian Free Army (SFA), formerly known as the Mughawir al-Thawra.²⁷⁹

The SDF operates in Hasakah governorate, in the Dar az Zawr and Raqqah governorates east of the Euphrates River, and in portions of the Aleppo governorate.²⁸⁰ The SFA occupies outposts in and secures a deconfliction zone within a 55-kilometer radius around At Tanf Garrison, near the confluence of Syria’s border with Jordan and Iraq. The SFA provides force protection against pro-regime forces and Iran-aligned militia group positions surrounding the deconfliction zone.²⁸¹

Coalition forces operate and support the SDF in the Eastern Syria Security Area, which includes Hasakah governorate and parts of Dayr az Zawr east of the Euphrates. Coalition forces also supported SDF operations in Raqqah during the quarter.²⁸² Coalition forces advise, assist and enable the SDF, including through training, aerial surveillance, and medevac support for injured SDF personnel.²⁸³ The Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) reported that DoD support to the SDF improves its ability to disrupt ISIS plotting, provide wide-area security to areas liberated from ISIS, maintain the humane and secure detention of ISIS fighters, and disrupt ISIS networks in the al-Hol displaced persons camp.²⁸⁴

OUSD(P) reported that the DoD’s military partnership with the SDF and other local partners is one element of a broader whole-of-government strategy to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS, which among other activities, prioritizes the repatriation of non-Syrian nationals to their country of origin and stabilization assistance to areas liberated from ISIS to prevent the group’s resurgence.²⁸⁵

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

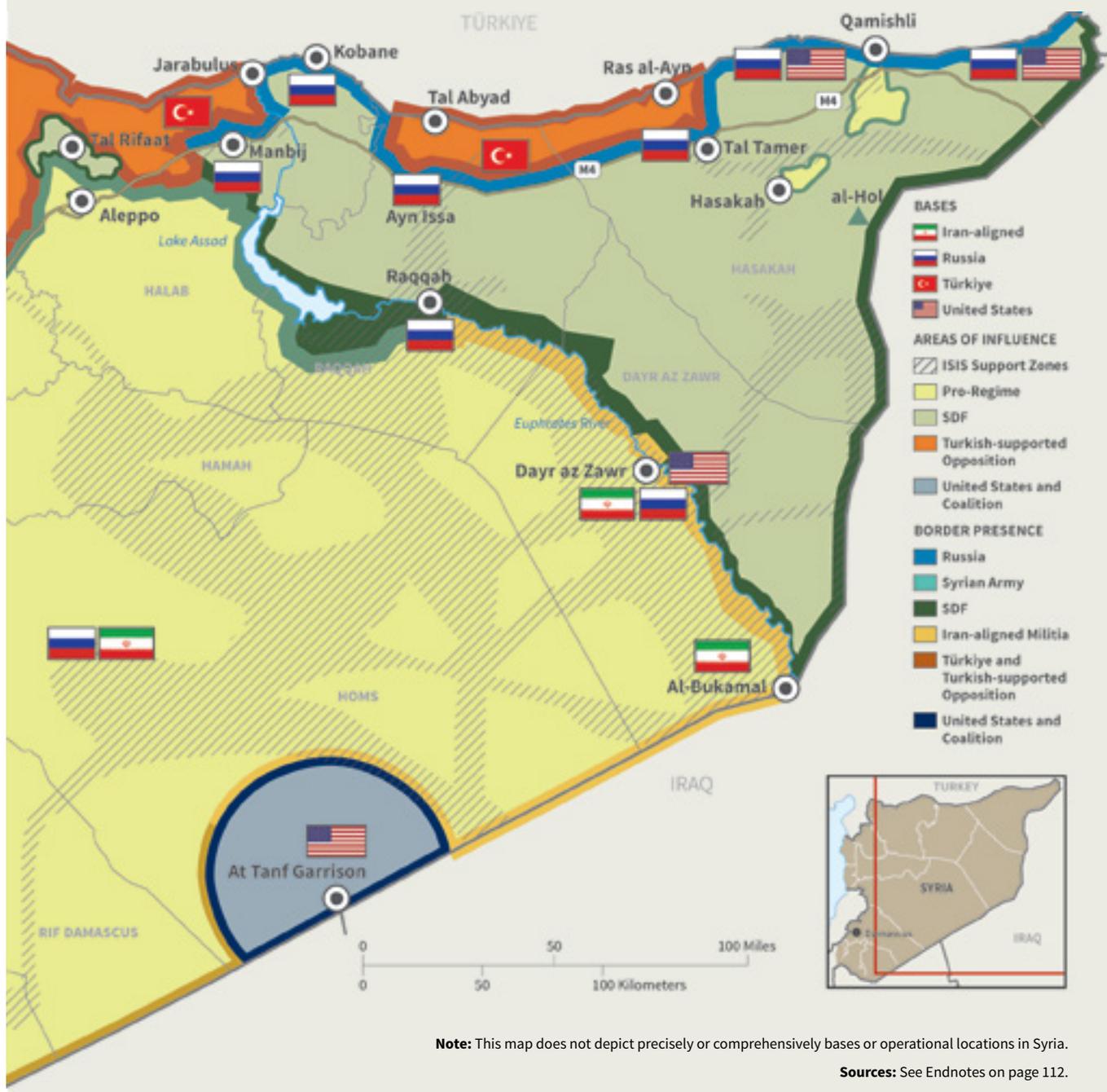
Counter-ISIS operations in Syria are conducted in a complex operating environment where Coalition and partner forces operate in close proximity to other military and rival forces.²⁸⁶ (See page 51.) During the quarter, Iranian and Russian forces—both partners of the Syrian regime—conducted provocative activities against Coalition and U.S. forces, including deadly Iranian airstrikes on U.S. bases.²⁸⁷ In the north, hostilities between Türkiye and the SDF continued to flare.²⁸⁸ The February earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye, while having

During the quarter, Iranian and Russian forces—both partners of the Syrian regime—conducted provocative activities against Coalition and U.S. forces, including deadly Iranian airstrikes on U.S. bases.

THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT IN SYRIA

Coalition forces in Syria operate in a complex political and military environment. Violence associated with the Syrian civil war, which begun in 2011, has destabilized the country and led to the deaths of more than half a million people. Today, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, with military support from Russia and Iran, controls most of the country.

The Coalition supports partner forces in areas not under regime control, including the SDF in the northeast and the SFA near the At Tanf Garrison. Russian and pro-regime forces also operate in these areas. Türkiye exercises influence over territory along the northern border and conducts cross-border operations that often target SDF forces. All of these rival forces operate in close proximity, often restricting Coalition and partner force movement, distracting partner forces, limiting humanitarian access, and putting civilians at risk.



A U.S. Army MaxxPro passes a Soldier during a patrol in eastern Syria.
(U.S. Army photo)



dire humanitarian consequences, had a minimal impact on counter-ISIS operations in northeastern Syria.²⁸⁹

Iran-aligned Militias, U.S. Forces Exchange Strikes After U.S. Contractor Killed

Iran-aligned militias escalated hostilities against U.S. and Coalition forces in Syria during the quarter, conducting at least eight attacks including a one-way unmanned aerial system (UAS) attack on March 23 that resulted in the death of a U.S. contractor.²⁹⁰ The March 23 attack and another the following day wounded 25 U.S. military personnel, including several who suffered traumatic brain injuries.²⁹¹ According to CJTF-OIR, the UAS struck a base maintenance facility at Rumaylan Landing Zone from an unknown point of origin.²⁹² According to a DoD statement, the U.S. intelligence community assessed the UAS to be of Iranian origin.²⁹³ Liwa al-Ghaliboun, an Iran-aligned group, claimed responsibility for the attack and threatened to conduct additional attacks in the future.²⁹⁴

The U.S. responded to the attack with airstrikes on facilities in Syria used by groups affiliated with the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). CJTF-OIR reported that the strikes targeted IRGC positions near al-Bukamal, on the southern outskirts of al-Mayadin, an ammunition warehouse in Dayr az Zawr city, and the “rural development center” opposite the “officers’ residences” in the Harabesh neighborhood of Dayr az Zawr city.²⁹⁵ USCENTCOM reported that eight militiamen died in the strikes.²⁹⁶

CJTF-OIR said that after the U.S. strikes, Iran-aligned militias in al-Mayadin, al-Bukamal, and Dayr az Zawr amassed their troops and were put on high alert in preparation for new attacks. The next day, March 24, militias launched more attacks against Coalition facilities at Mission Support Site Conoco and Mission Support Site Green Village in Dayr az Zawr governorate with indirect fire and four one-way UAS. Three U.S. Service members were wounded during the indirect fire attack on Conoco. Meanwhile, two of the four UAS

The DIA reported that Iran-aligned militias attempted four other rocket attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces in eastern Syria during the quarter.

targeting Green Village were shot down, with the other two UAS striking the base but causing no injuries.²⁹⁷ Additionally, USCENTCOM reported that 10 rockets targeted Green Village on March 24; no U.S. or Coalition personnel suffered casualties in that attack, but the strike injured nearby civilians.²⁹⁸

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that Iran-aligned militias attempted four other rocket attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces in eastern Syria during the quarter.²⁹⁹ Additionally, an Iran-aligned group operating in Iraq also claimed responsibility for the January 20 UAS attack against the At Tanf Garrison that wounded two SFA personnel. Though the group asserted that U.S. forces were the intended target, partner forces in Syria are threatened by Iran and Iran-aligned forces by virtue of being proximally located to Coalition forces. The DIA assessed that these attacks are consistent with attack trends against U.S. interests in Syria over the previous two quarters.³⁰⁰ According to CJTF-OIR, Iran-aligned militias conducted 14 attacks against Coalition targets in Syria since January 2022.³⁰¹

CJTF-OIR assessed that the threat posed by one-way UAS and indirect fire attacks by Iran-aligned militias in Syria remains high, resulting in increased force protection requirements at installations in Syria. CJTF-OIR said that, as in Iraq, credible militia threats and attacks prompt the Coalition to reallocate ISR assets to monitor the threats, which reduces ISR availability to support counter-ISIS and partner force operations.³⁰² During the attacks on March 23 and 24, Coalition counter-ISIS operations continued as planned after a 24 hour pause.³⁰³ Overall, CJTF-OIR assessed the impact on the OIR campaign of the threat from Iran-aligned militias to be low. However, the potential for Coalition casualties as a result of militia hostile intent could cause friction amongst the Coalition partners and impact public opinion, putting the Coalition at risk.³⁰⁴

Russian Violations of Air Safety Protocols Increase

Russian violations of safety protocols with the U.S. military increased in March, with near daily Russian flights over U.S. forces, particularly near At Tanf Garrison.³⁰⁵ Since 2019, CJTF-OIR has maintained daily contact with Russian counterparts in Syria to deconflict air and ground operations.³⁰⁶ However, in March, Lieutenant General Alexis Grynkewich, the Combined Forces Air Component Commander for USCENTCOM, said in a media interview that Russia, in its activities, “seemed to abandon that tenet of the protocols.”³⁰⁷

General Kurilla, the USCENTCOM Commander, said that in March, Russian forces conducted the highest number of tactical air flights (fighter aircraft or air-to-ground aircraft) over U.S. forces in Syria since the beginning of the Syrian conflict.³⁰⁸ As of March 22, Russian jets had conducted 25 tactical flights over At Tanf, compared to none in February and 14 in January.³⁰⁹ Some of the aircraft carried air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions.³¹⁰ General Kurilla described the Russian behavior as “unnecessary, unsafe, and unprofessional.”³¹¹

The Russian overflights have not impacted U.S. military operations in Syria. Lieutenant General Grynkewich said that U.S. and other Coalition forces often shadow the Russian aircraft from afar and the main concern was a “miscalculation, or unprofessional or immature action.”³¹² While U.S. forces have the capability to intercept any dangerous activity, such escalation has the potential to affect the counter-ISIS mission, he said.³¹³

General Kurilla testified that the violations signaled that Russia was trying to “renegotiate the deconfliction protocols.”³¹⁴ CJTF-OIR noted that Russia’s goal is to impede Coalition mission to defeat ISIS and enable the Syrian regime to regain control of the entire country.³¹⁵

Russia maintains more than 2,500 military personnel in Syria, which Russia views as a base to project influence and power throughout the region, while providing what General Kurilla described as “indispensable” military support to the Syrian regime.³¹⁶ During the quarter, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow and said he would welcome more Russian military bases or troops in Syria and would like the Russian presence to become permanent.³¹⁷

In late January, Russian and Syrian forces re-opened the al-Jarrah joint base, east of Aleppo, which had been recaptured from ISIS in 2017, as an additional option for forward deploying aircraft for air patrols along the northern Syrian border.³¹⁸ The DIA reported that in mid-February, Russia publicized its temporary redeployment of Russian forces in Syria to support earthquake recovery efforts in regime-held northwestern Syria. Russian force disposition in northeastern Syria otherwise remained unchanged.³¹⁹

Turkish-supported Forces Continue to Target the SDF

Tensions between Turkish or Turkish-supported opposition (TSO) forces and the SDF continued sporadically throughout the quarter, with clashes and shelling erupting between the forces even after the earthquakes in southern Türkiye and northwestern Syria. However, the DIA reported that it observed no significant escalations.³²⁰ CJTF-OIR, citing media sources, said that Turkish forces conducted 12 airstrikes targeting the SDF during the quarter, 4 targeting SDF leadership and 8 targeting SDF facilities.³²¹

In late February, Turkish media reported that Turkish intelligence conducted a strike in northern Syria on a Syrian Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) member who was allegedly involved in a November 2022 bombing in Istanbul.³²² Turkish authorities had blamed the Istanbul bombing, which killed six people and wounded more than 80, on the PKK, as well as the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), which are the primary component of the SDF. The SDF, YPG and PKK all denied involvement.³²³

Türkiye does not differentiate between the SDF and the PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that has been waging a longtime insurgency against Türkiye.³²⁴ Türkiye claimed Syrian PKK affiliates continued rocket attacks during the quarter on Turkish positions, including border posts.³²⁵ Turkish leaders have threatened to launch a new ground offensive into northern Syria to remove the PKK and the SDF from its border.³²⁶

In November 2022, the threat of a Turkish ground incursion caused the SDF to pause counter-ISIS operations. CJTF-OIR said there were no pauses or lapses in SDF counter-ISIS operations or training during the quarter.³²⁷

While threats of a Turkish incursion quieted following the February earthquakes, CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF continued preparations for the possibility.³²⁸ In addition, Turkish UAS flown over northeastern Syria posed a security concern for the SDF.³²⁹

Russia maintains more than 2,500 military personnel in Syria, which Russia views as a base to project influence and power throughout the region, while providing what General Kurilla described as “indispensable” military support to the Syrian regime.



Coalition forces fire 120mm illumination rounds using an XM905 Advanced Mortar Protection System from a fire base in Syria. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

CJTF-OIR said that a Turkish ground offensive would almost certainly degrade SDF ability to conduct counter-ISIS operations.³³⁰ The DIA reported that the SDF would shift its focus away from counterterrorism operations and ISIS would “probably move quickly” to set up new bases of operation, new safe havens, and new sources of revenue and weapons.³³¹

State warned that escalation in Syria and along the Turkish-Syrian border is “dangerous” and threatens civilians on both side of the border and potentially U.S. personnel.³³² While the U.S. Government recognizes Türkiye’s long-standing concerns about U.S. cooperation with the SDF in the counter-ISIS campaign, State said it is “crucial for all sides to maintain and respect ceasefire zones to enhance stability in Syria and work toward a political solution to the conflict.”³³³

During the quarter, Türkiye participated in nascent Russian-led negotiations with the Syrian regime on Syrian security issues, the DIA reported. As of mid-March, the Turkish deputy foreign minister was planning to meet his Syrian, Russian, and Iranian counterparts in Moscow for negotiations on Syria.³³⁴

The U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) reported that a rapprochement between Türkiye and the Syrian regime has the potential to prevent the need for a Turkish incursion.³³⁵ However Syrian President Assad stated in mid-March that he would not meet with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan until Türkiye completely withdraws its forces from northern Syria.³³⁶

Non-Coalition Counter-ISIS Operations Continue

Non-Coalition forces—including those from Russia, the Syrian regime, and Türkiye—continued to conduct operations against ISIS cells in Syria during the quarter. In the Central Syrian Desert, Russia continued to conduct sporadic airstrikes in support of Syrian regime-aligned forces’ counterterrorism operations against ISIS.³³⁷ These operations were consistent with Russian counter-ISIS activities during the previous quarter.³³⁸

General Kurilla told Congress in March that he did not take the Russian counter-ISIS operations in Syria seriously. He said that while Coalition forces are in Syria to legitimately fight ISIS, the Russian forces are there “under the guise” of the ISIS fight.³³⁹

Türkiye continued to conduct operations against ISIS within its own borders.³⁴⁰ USEUCOM reported that Türkiye’s threatened incursion into Syria did not curtail the country’s domestic counterterrorism capability. In February, Turkish security services arrested more than a dozen individuals associated with an ISIS threat against European consulates in Türkiye.³⁴¹

The DIA reported that while Turkish counterterrorism pressure almost certainly constrained ISIS’s ability to successfully conduct attacks in and from Türkiye, it did not dissuade the group from using Türkiye as a facilitation hub to support regional and global activity.³⁴² Since January, Turkish security forces routinely conducted raids and detained ISIS members in an effort to deter cross-border facilitation, constrain financial and logistic support, and disrupt potential threats.³⁴³ Turkish law enforcement disrupted a possible ISIS attack plot in Türkiye. In early March, Turkish media reported that the Turkish police arrested a former ISIS official in an operation in Istanbul.³⁴⁴

The DIA said that the February earthquakes possibly could impact the facilitation and movement of ISIS fighters in the region.³⁴⁵

Since January, Turkish security forces routinely conducted raids and detained ISIS members in an effort to deter cross-border facilitation, constrain financial and logistic support, and disrupt potential threats.

COALITION AND SDF OPERATIONS

As in Iraq, CJTF-OIR provided critical materials through the DoD Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) to enable vetted partner forces to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS.³⁴⁶ CTEF is the primary fiscal authority for providing materiel and other defeat-ISIS support to vetted Syrian partner forces.³⁴⁷ Of the \$475 million CTEF enacted for FY 2023, \$160 million was designated to support partner forces in Syria.³⁴⁸ During the quarter, CJTF-OIR used CTEF to provide \$5.7 million in materiel and \$13.9 million in stipends to the SDF.³⁴⁹ (See Figure 6)

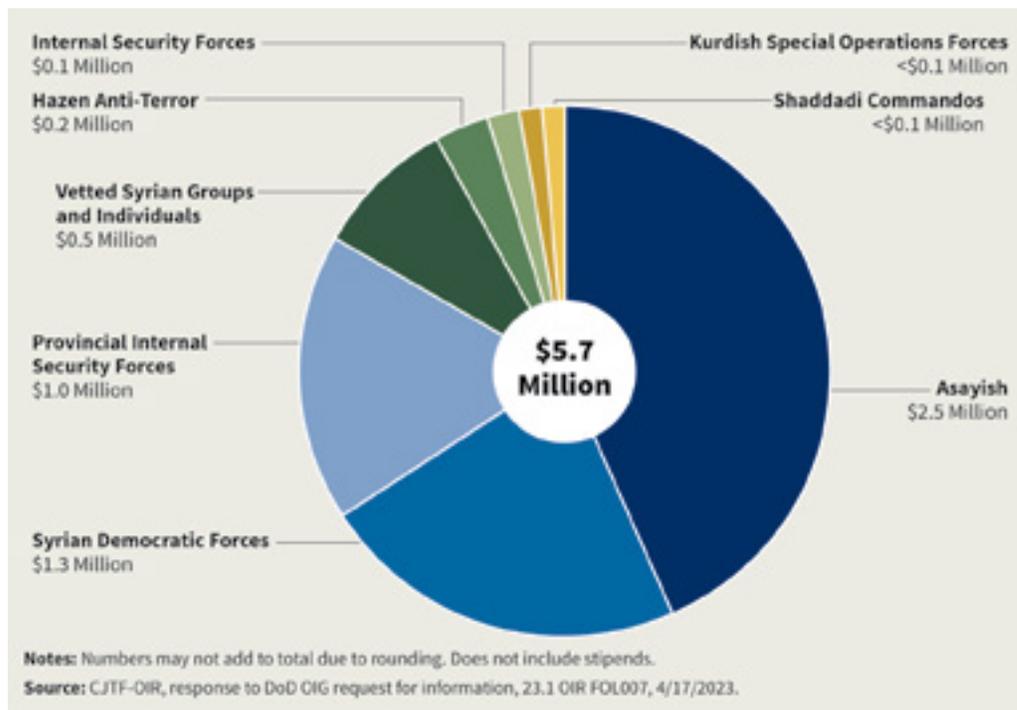
Partnered SDF Operations Target ISIS Nodes Involved in Detention Facility Attack Plots

Coalition forces conducted 2 unilateral and 40 partnered operations against ISIS in Syria during the quarter, resulting in 9 ISIS operatives killed and at least 244 detained.³⁵⁰ Coalition forces conducted 35 operations with partner forces in Syria during the previous quarter.³⁵¹

The partnered operations included helicopter raids against ISIS targets, according to a USCENTCOM statement on social media.³⁵² During one partnered helicopter operation on February 17 targeting a senior ISIS leader, four U.S. Service members and a working dog were wounded when an explosive erupted at the site. The ISIS leader, Hamza al-Homsi, was killed.³⁵³

The SDF, with Coalition advisement, conducted at least two multi-day clearance operations that CJTF-OIR said helped increase security and protect residents in local communities from ISIS threats.³⁵⁴ The SDF and Coalition also conducted targeted operations to remove ISIS command and control nodes and members responsible for plotting and planning detention facility attacks.³⁵⁵

Figure 6.

CTEF-funded Support to Syrian Partner Forces, January–March 2023

During an 8-day operation from December 29 through January 6, the SDF searched for ISIS hotbeds in three towns in Hasakah governorate (al-Hol, Tal Hamis, and Tal Brak) as well as large areas of the Syria-Iraq border.³⁵⁶ CJTF-OIR said that more than 170 ISIS members were detained and hundreds of weapons and equipment was seized.³⁵⁷ The SDF reported that among those captured were three ISIS operatives who were involved in providing logistical support and manufacturing vehicle bombs for the large-scale Ghwayran Detention Facility attack in January 2022.³⁵⁸

On January 25, the SDF, supported by Coalition airpower and in coordination with Internal Security Forces (InSF), launched a second weeklong operation during the quarter in Raqqah governorate, in response to the killing of six InSF fighters in December.³⁵⁹ The SDF reported that it acted on information collected during prior operations that revealed that the new ISIS leadership was attempting to reorganize cells and appoint new cell leaders in the Middle Euphrates River Valley with a focus on liberating ISIS detainees, targeting civilians who won't support the terrorist group, and opening operating corridors near Raqqah for attacks. The SDF said its forces raided dozens of potential hideouts in Raqqah and nearby regions, and arrested 127 ISIS suspects, including the top ISIS official in Raqqah.³⁶⁰

CJTF-OIR said that SDF counter-ISIS operations led to a steady decline in ISIS activity in the region during the quarter, which created a “relative[ly] stable environment” in the Middle Euphrates Valley and in SDF detention facilities.³⁶¹ The SDF continues to prove itself as

a capable force in counterterrorism operations, security, and as an effective intelligence partner, CJTF-OIR said.³⁶²

CJTF-OIR noted that in most advise, assist, and enable operations, the U.S. and Coalition forces provided ISR support to the SDF. Coalition support also included U.S. medevac for SDF soldiers who are critically injured during the conduct of an operation, to save life, limb, or eyesight. Other than those two assets, most SDF operations were conducted with SDF assets.³⁶³

Coalition forces also maintained public presence in northeastern Syria, conducting live-fire and operational exercises and military patrols. CJTF-OIR reported that it conducted near-daily live fire or ground and air exercises during the quarter across its operating areas, spanning from Hasakah and Dayr az Zawr governorates in northeastern Syria and near the At Tanf Garrison further south.³⁶⁴

The SDF reported that on March 15, nine of its personnel died when two helicopters crashed in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The SDF said the helicopters were en route to Sulaymaniyah, part of an “exchange of expertise” with an unspecified entity in their fight against ISIS. A Coalition spokesperson cited in the media said that the helicopters involved did not belong to the Coalition.³⁶⁵ According to press reporting, Kurdish Prime Minister Masrour Barzani

InSF personnel hold certificates of completion during a graduation ceremony at the InSF training academy. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)



Coalition forces provided specialized training to guards for detention facilities holding ISIS detainees, and by improving security at these detention facilities.

stated that one of the helicopters involved in the crash was purchased by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), a rival political party. PUK leader Bafel Talabani publicly expressed condolences to the SDF counterterrorism unit that lost members in the crash.³⁶⁶

U.S. Army Special Forces Continue to Advise and Train the SDF and Affiliated Security Guard Forces

During the quarter, U.S. Special Forces focused their training and advising efforts on supporting continuous SDF operations against ISIS across northeastern Syria. Coalition forces also provided specialized training to guards for detention facilities holding ISIS detainees, and by improving security at these detention facilities.³⁶⁷ In early March, the Combined Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant reported that 154 InSF personnel completed security guard training.³⁶⁸

CJTF-OIR said that training for both counterterrorism forces and detention facility guards is done through direct, hands-on instruction. U.S. forces are working with the SDF to identify SDF instructors to supplement the U.S. personnel and create indigenous training capability.³⁶⁹

CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF have the ability to successfully execute unilateral operations and rely on the Coalition for capabilities they do not have, such as airborne ISR and medevac assets. There was no significant change to SDF ability to conduct counterterrorism and conventional type operations during the quarter.³⁷⁰

SFA OPERATIONS AND TRAINING

SFA Conducts Partnered and Independent Training-related Operations and Patrols

Within the deconfliction zone around At Tanf Garrison, the SFA continued to conduct patrols and wide area security at a pace similar to the previous quarter.³⁷¹ CJTF-OIR said that all SFA operations are training-related and focus on defensive tasks.³⁷²

During the quarter, the SFA conducted 61 partnered training operations with Coalition Forces, compared to 32 partnered operations during the previous quarter.³⁷³ The SFA also conducted routine area security operations and patrols independent of Coalition forces and seized \$80,000 worth of contraband during interdictions of known smuggling routes. In addition, SFA medical soldiers assisted in more than 28 advanced surgeries conducted by a Coalition medical mission.³⁷⁴

While the SFA had no confirmed kinetic engagements during the quarter, an SFA medical clinic on At Tanf Garrison was struck by a one-way UAS.³⁷⁵ CJTF-OIR said that other than two SFA soldiers who were lightly wounded and returned to duty the same day, there were no sustained casualties or damage at the medical facility.³⁷⁶ The DIA reported that the Iran-aligned group that claimed responsibility for the attack asserted that U.S. forces were the intended target.³⁷⁷

SFA Continues to Grow its Capabilities with U.S. Training and Advising

CJTF-OIR advises, assists, and enables the SFA to conduct routine training that achieves increased levels of readiness. Coalition forces conducted train-the-trainer sessions and bi-weekly patrols to train the soldiers at combat outposts (COP) during the quarter.³⁷⁸

CJTF-OIR training support during the quarter included routine training to enhance skills and readiness in such areas as weapons proficiency, medical response, communications techniques, integrated fires, and synchronizing operations of more than one COP.³⁷⁹ CJTF-OIR said that the SFA continued to build proficiency in many of these tasks, which helped to improve efficiency at the squad and platoon levels.³⁸⁰

The SFA demonstrated improvement in several areas, including communications at the team and platoon levels through both line of sight and command and control planning; establishing observation posts with integrated COP defense plans; conducting troop leading procedures at platoon and company level; mortar registration and certification; evaluating and treating casualties using tactical combat care and advanced field techniques; advancing from individual qualification to crew-served machine gunnery; and planning logistics that supports operations and basic life support at individual COPs.³⁸¹ SFA doctors also assisted U.S. medical personnel in emergency surgeries, getting hands-on training.³⁸²

Coalition forces conducted joint fire and maneuver training with the SFA this quarter. This progressed to a live-fire validation exercise assessed by Coalition forces.³⁸³ CJTF-OIR said that maintaining these critical capabilities will be key to the defense of the At Tanf Garrison area.³⁸⁴ CJTF-OIR noted that currently, the SFA is dependent on Coalition forces for protection against one-way UAS attacks; Coalition forces are not providing the SFA training in this area.³⁸⁵

The SFA primarily rely on Coalition support for all material, which is provided through CTEF.³⁸⁶ During the quarter, Coalition forces provided the SFA with ammunition, including assault rifle, mortar, and illumination rounds.³⁸⁷

SDF DETENTION FACILITIES

Detention Centers Holding ISIS Detainees are “Moderately” Secure

Security of the estimated 10,000 ISIS detainees held in SDF-run facilities in Syria continued to concern the Coalition and its partners during the quarter. CJTF-OIR said that most of the 26 facilities operated by the SDF are “moderately secure and sufficient to keep detainees from escaping and rejoining the ISIS fight.”³⁸⁸ The February earthquakes caused some damage to the Raqqah Detention Center, but the facility is structurally intact and operational.³⁸⁹

CJTF-OIR said it observed no significant changes in SDF capability to manage detention facilities and safeguard against future attacks.³⁹⁰ Coalition forces continued to train InSF guard forces for the detention centers.³⁹¹ CJTF-OIR said it had no specific information

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available to characterize the ability of detention facility guards to prevent communication or smuggling between ISIS detainees and external facilitators.³⁹²

CJTF-OIR said that SDF and InSF operations during the quarter disrupted ISIS networks, including command and control nodes directly involved in plotting attacks on detention facilities, leading to a steady decrease in ISIS activity and reducing ISIS’s ability to effectively attack detention facilities.³⁹³

Nonetheless, DoD and international officials said that ISIS’s persistence in its intent to breakout its fighters remained a viable threat.³⁹⁴ During a visit to Syria in March, USCENTCOM Commander General Kurilla called ISIS detainees in Syria and Iraq a “veritable army in detention” and said that “if freed, [the] group would pose a great threat regionally and beyond.”³⁹⁵ United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reported that ISIS efforts to replenish its cadres through detention facility breakouts remained a “serious risk.”³⁹⁶

CJTF-OIR said that, despite false ISIS claims about prison breaks, there were no ISIS riots, uprising or known attempts by ISIS fighters to escape SDF detention facilities.³⁹⁷

The ISIS population in SDF detention includes Syrians, Iraqis, and non-Iraqi, non-Syrian fighters—possibly the largest concentration of terrorist fighters in the world.³⁹⁸ The SDF has stated that holding these detainees places a burden on its security forces and has proposed an international tribunal to address the fate of detainees whose countries of origin are not willing to repatriate them.³⁹⁹

Repatriation of Foreign Detainees Remains Slow

The U.S. Government maintains that the most durable solution to address the challenges of these detention centers is for countries of origin to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and where appropriate prosecute their nationals currently in northeastern Syria.⁴⁰⁰

On March 7, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS convened the Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) Working Group to share best practices for repatriation and reintegration of FTFs and their family members, State said.⁴⁰¹ Topics included monitoring FTF movement from ISIS Core (Iraq and Syria), financial movements’ impact on FTF movement, and effective prosecution.⁴⁰²

The United States urged countries to repatriate their nationals held in SDF detention facilities and worked with the SDF to facilitate repatriations on a case-by-case basis.⁴⁰³ During the quarter, Iraq worked directly with the SDF to repatriate 100 Iraqi detainees, according to State.⁴⁰⁴ No foreign terrorist fighters were repatriated this quarter.⁴⁰⁵

State said that the February earthquakes in northwestern Syria did not impact repatriation and reintegration efforts at displaced persons camps in northeastern Syria or FTF repatriations.⁴⁰⁶

DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS

ISIS-related Violence in al-Hol Declines

ISIS activity and related violence in the al-Hol camp for displaced persons continued to decline during the quarter. The DIA said the reduced violence was a result of the large SDF clearance operation in the camp in late 2022 and increased constraints on ISIS members' ability to move freely in the camp and communicate with members inside and outside the camp.⁴⁰⁷

ISIS efforts to smuggle children and adolescents from the camp also likely slowed, as capabilities across Iraq and Syria weakened.⁴⁰⁸ State reported that there were no killings reported in al-Hol during the quarter.⁴⁰⁹

State reported that ordinary criminal activity in the camp continued at the same pace as previous quarters, and included “threats of extortion against humanitarian organizations” that work at the camp.⁴¹⁰ USAID and State received multiple reports of armed factions claiming to be ISIS making threats and demanding money from NGO-employed guards at al-Hol.⁴¹¹ USAID and State reported that no international NGOs made any payments.⁴¹²

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ISIS Remains a Threat to al-Hol Residents

As in the rest of the region, the DoD has not changed its assessment of the potential threat ISIS poses in the camp.⁴¹³ The DIA assessed that ISIS leaders likely continued to view strategic value to the group's recovery in having members operating within the camp population, and the poor living conditions at al-Hol create a favorable environment for ISIS to exert its influence.⁴¹⁴

Approximately 52,000 people still reside in al-Hol, including many families of ISIS fighters captured or killed in the battle of Baghuz in March 2019.⁴¹⁵ More than 90 percent of the residents are women and children. The camp is overpopulated and conditions are poor.⁴¹⁶ An unknown number of those family members still adhere to ISIS ideology.⁴¹⁷

The UN Secretary-General reported that the camp posed “increasingly grave security, legal, human rights and humanitarian risks,” particularly regarding the ongoing ISIS indoctrination of children in al-Hol.⁴¹⁸ The DIA said that ISIS cultivates the youth in the camp, especially adolescent boys and young men as future fighters and rank-and-file members, and regularly smuggles small numbers of them out to training camps in the Syrian Desert.⁴¹⁹ General Kurilla told Congress in March that ISIS ideology “remains a threat throughout the camp.”⁴²⁰ General Kurilla stated that the more than 30,000 children in al-Hol and the more than 1,000 in the al-Roj camp had little meaningful education, no access to the outside world, limited hot water, and few constructive outlets to develop their potential. The children are “at risk of becoming casualties to an ideological war within the camps,” General Kurilla said.⁴²¹

The DIA said that ISIS operates in al-Hol in a similar way to how radical groups often organize in prisons, with a small number of dedicated ISIS members functioning as a central nexus able to attract, coerce, and compel the concentrated and isolated population to at least

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outwardly support the group.⁴²² ISIS probably views the camp as a remnant of its so-called “caliphate” and as a base for resurrecting the movement, according to the DIA’s analysis.⁴²³

State, DoD, and USAID Work to Improve Security in al-Hol Camp

State, USAID and the DoD continued to work together during the quarter to support implementation of humanitarian partner recommendations for improved security at al-Hol by engaging with local camp authorities and the Self-Administration of North East Syria (SANES).⁴²⁴ SANES, the humanitarian community, and the U.S. Government “continue work to improve both external and internal security without compromising humanitarian services” at al-Hol, State said.⁴²⁵

State remained supportive of efforts to remove violent actors, active ISIS operatives, and weapons from the camp, noting that high levels of violence impede the ability of humanitarian organizations to safely provide assistance, and “further traumatize an already vulnerable population.”⁴²⁶ Short-term security improvements are “urgently needed to minimize threats to camp residents,” and longer-term solutions are needed to “properly train and equip external and internal security actors,” State said.⁴²⁷

CJTF-OIR reported that the overall security posture in al-Hol has increased monthly as more security guard recruits graduate basic training to operate in the camp. The increase in number of personnel has greatly contributed to the safety within the camp.⁴²⁸

Camp security personnel also continued to take professionalization courses to learn the best practices for interacting with the camp population.⁴²⁹ In addition to training of security forces, the Coalition continued to provide basic life support facilities, armored vehicles, and housing units for al-Hol security, CJTF-OIR said.⁴³⁰

During the quarter, partner forces arrested violent instigators and confiscated weapons and military equipment within al-Hol in an attempt to curb ISIS activities within the camp. CJTF-OIR said that camp security forces also established more patrols around the perimeter to combat ISIS smuggling into and out of the camp.⁴³¹ A Syrian war monitor reported in late January that the SDF arrested six Asayish members who were working in al-Hol on suspicion that they facilitated the smuggling of ISIS families from the camp in exchange for large sums of money.⁴³²

Still, camp security forces continued to face challenges in trying to prevent the smuggling of personnel and weapons and to disrupt ISIS indoctrination efforts.⁴³³ SDF guards at al-Hol have received ISIS threats by cell phone and now only enter the camp in U.S.-provided Bearcat armored vehicles, according to a media report.⁴³⁴

Efforts to Help, Repatriate, and Reintegrate Residents of al-Hol

COUNTRIES SLOW TO TAKE NATIONALS BACK

The U.S. Government maintains that the “only practical long-term solution” for the humanitarian and security challenges at al-Hol is the “safe and voluntary return and repatriation of camp residents”— returning them home to their countries or communities of origin to be repatriated for rehabilitation and reintegration or prosecution, as warranted.⁴³⁵ Many countries remain unwilling to facilitate repatriation of their nationals in Syria.⁴³⁶

In January and February, more than 1,300 individuals were repatriated from al-Hol, 1,161 of whom were Iraqis.⁴³⁷ State did not track any formal departures of Syrians from al-Hol this quarter.⁴³⁸ According to State, Syrian departures from al-Hol have slowed since early January 2022.⁴³⁹ At the twice-yearly UN Security Council briefing in February on the threat posed by ISIS, UN counterterrorism officials warned that the pace of repatriations remained “too slow.”⁴⁴⁰

STATE AND USAID CONDUCT ASSESSMENTS TO SUPPORT AL-HOL REINTEGRATION

Security and humanitarian conditions in al-Hol camp remain in critical need of additional support, State said.⁴⁴¹ State and USAID coordinated efforts this quarter to assess needs related to the return and reintegration of Syrians from al-Hol camp to expand support for reintegration in communities of return.⁴⁴²

State facilitated an assessment on al-Hol return and reintegration, looking specifically at Syrian residents.⁴⁴³ USAID Syria Stabilization staff also worked to facilitate voluntary repatriations and support successful reintegration. Staff consulted with local civil councils and conducted a desk review of existing assessments to understand the data around the needs of al-Hol returnees and their communities of return.⁴⁴⁴

Mapping USAID stabilization programming against locations of returnees, staff developed a white paper on the needs of al-Hol returnees and their communities of return.⁴⁴⁵ USAID implementers held workshops with al-Hol returnees to better understand their reintegration needs, according to USAID.⁴⁴⁶

Table 7.

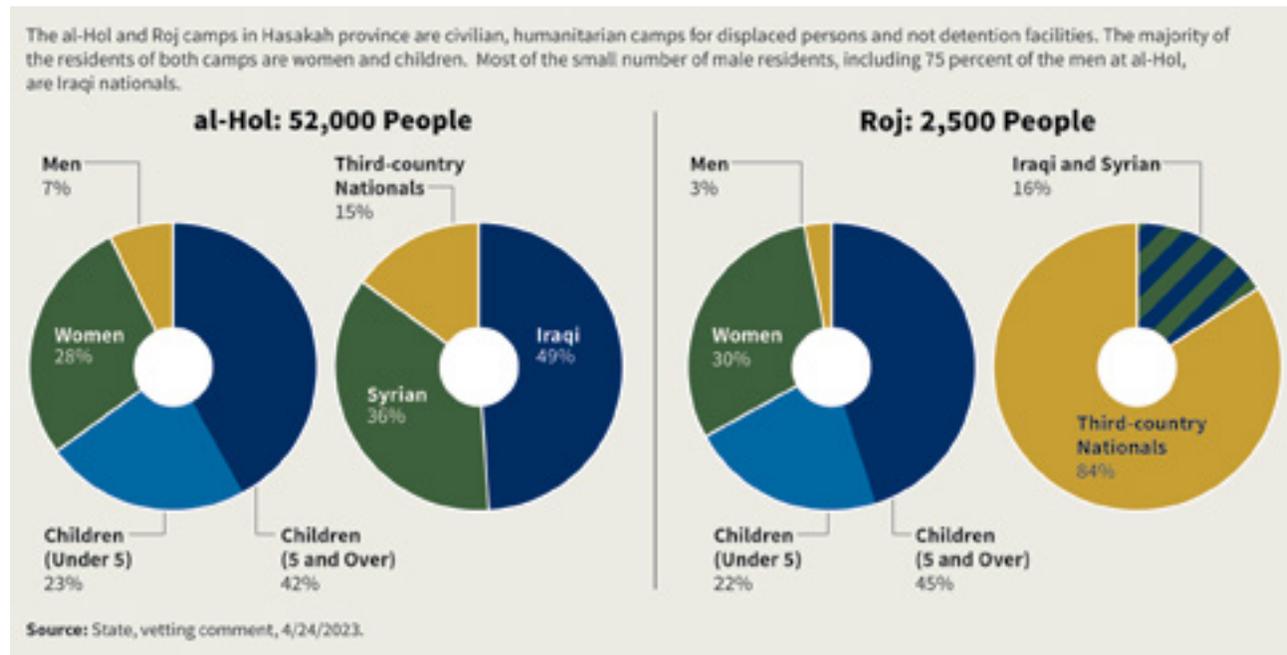
Repatriations of Foreign Nationals from al-Hol During the Quarter

Month	Country/Total
January	Iraq: 580 France: 47 Spain: 15 Barbados: 3
February	Iraq: 581 Kyrgyzstan: 59 (18 women and 41 children) Slovakia: 3 (1 woman and 2 children)
March	Russia: 49 Norway: 5 (2 women and 3 children) Sudan: 5 (2 women and 3 children)

Sources: State, press release, “U.S. Welcomes Kyrgyzstan’s Repatriation of Nationals from Northeast Syria,” 2/20/2023; State, vetting comment, 4/24/2023.

Figure 7.

Demographics of the al-Hol and Roj Displaced Persons Camps



Humanitarian Assistance Funded at al-Hol and Roj Camps

State said that during the quarter, it funded essential services at al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps, including maintenance of physical infrastructure; the distribution of food, water, and other assistance; and the overall coordination of humanitarian assistance with the camp.⁴⁴⁷ Through partnerships with UN humanitarian organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGO), the U.S. Government also provided significant life-saving assistance for the camp including shelter, winterization supplies, health, education, and sanitation.⁴⁴⁸

State said it supported three international organizations involved in humanitarian responses throughout Syria across multiple sectors. State also funded two NGO partners: one provides the camp management functions at al-Hol and Roj, and the other provides multi-sectoral assistance to out-of-camp Iraqi refugees living throughout Syria.⁴⁴⁹ A USAID implementer also provided daily bread to vulnerable people in al-Hol to complement ongoing food ration distributions, health care, protection services and water, sanitation, and hygiene activities.⁴⁵⁰

STABILIZATION

U.S. Government stabilization assistance plays a critical role in the OIR mission by addressing the economic and social gaps previously exploited by ISIS and other violent extremist groups, improving local service provider capacity, and supporting civil society to advocate for citizen needs.⁴⁵¹

All of State’s stabilization programs in northeastern Syria continued this quarter, despite continued ISIS activity in the region. State-supported stabilization efforts worked with local governance entities, civil society, and Syrian communities to support education, community security, independent media, civil society, reintegration, transitional justice, accountability, restoration of essential services, and a political resolution to the conflict in line with UNSCR 2254.⁴⁵² (See Table 8.)

USAID-supported stabilization programs supported conflict mitigation, private sector productivity, economic recovery, livelihoods, and growth in northeastern Syria.⁴⁵³ (See Table 9.) In February, USAID notified Congress of its intent to use an additional \$11.5 million to support these activities, in addition to \$5 million previously notified.⁴⁵⁴ This funding will also be used to support agricultural revitalization in non-regime-held areas in northeastern Syria, including areas with vulnerable populations, a program area not previously included in the FY 2022 Congressional Budget Justification.⁴⁵⁵

Table 8.

State-funded Stabilization Programs in Syria During the Quarter

Program Goals	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Essential Services and Local Governance Seeks to build local councils’ ability to provide essential services to their communities.</p>	<p>Rehabilitated water infrastructure, trained technical teams that operate water stations, and built local authorities’ capacity to collect and share water quality information with humanitarian assistance providers to combat a cholera outbreak in northeastern Syria.</p> <p>Provided operational and infrastructure assistance to emergency medical teams, municipal vehicle mechanics, trash collection workers, firefighters, emergency response drivers, body exhumation teams, documentation/forensics specialists and rubble removal teams.</p>
<p>Civil Society Seeks to help civil society organizations restore essential services and livelihoods in areas liberated from ISIS.</p>	<p>Supported Syrian civil society organizations to restore essential services, improve livelihoods, represent Syrians, and strengthen social cohesion in communities liberated from ISIS and in communities with members of religious minority groups.</p>
<p>Education Seeks to build the capacity of local councils, their education committees, and community-based organization to provide remedial numeracy, primary education, and psychosocial support for children</p>	<p>Built the capacity of civil councils, education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial literacy and numeracy, technical and vocational training, psychosocial support, teacher training, and rehabilitation/winterization of schools.</p> <p>Rehabilitated and equipped schools in Raqqah.</p> <p>Provided training in computer skills, solar panel repair, carpentry, and other vocations.</p> <p>Worked with families recently returned from displaced persons camps through a social reintegration program focused on building cohesion in the communities.</p>

Program Goals	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Support to Independent Media Seeks to promote unbiased, professional, and relevant reporting.</p>	<p>Provided capacity building and operational support to 10 independent northern Syrian media outlets that improved access to accurate, unbiased information and countered violent extremism and disinformation perpetuated by Iran-backed militias, Russia, the Assad regime, and other malign actors.</p> <p>Provided emergency information to local communities about the February earthquakes in radio and digital formats, refuted disinformation related to the earthquakes, and provided information regarding COVID-19.</p> <p>Expanded news programs, gender programming, and programming discussing community issues.</p> <p>Supported gender inclusion in partners’ reporting and internal operations to improve the representation of women in the media by raising awareness of women’s issues and gender equity in media and reporting.</p> <p>Supported a media consumption survey for all media partners</p>
<p>Community Security Seeks to build the capacity of internal security forces to provide security in a way that supports, and is supported by, the communities they serve.</p>	<p>Supported the InSF and the governance bodies that oversee them to deliver community policing services that serves, and is supported by, the population.</p> <p>Rehabilitated InSF stations; held engagements between InSF officers and local community members; and rehabilitated streetlights in under-served areas to address a primary security concern of local communities.</p> <p>Provided a holistic approach to community security, supporting officer trainings, building the capacity of civilian authorities, promoting community engagement, and supporting public safety initiatives.</p>
<p>Syrian Political Process Seeks to strengthen the capabilities of stakeholders to participate in the Constitutional Committee and work with other UN-convened negotiations in support of UNSCR 2254.</p>	<p>Built the capacity of political process stakeholders to engage in UN-convened processes and fostered their engagement with Syrian civil society and marginalized populations.</p> <p>Supported workshops and dialogue sessions to help bridge the gap between local community-based organizations and their local constituents by facilitating initiatives to ensure political inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and outreach.</p>

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 3/23/2023.

Table 9.

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Syria During the Quarter

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Elections and Political Processes Seeks to enhance participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in transitional or electoral processes in Syria and improve inclusive citizen-governance relationships in northeastern Syria.</p>	<p>Assessments: Conducted rapid assessments among returnees from al-Hol and the communities they returned to in Raqqah and Dayr az Zawr.</p> <p>Training and Capacity Building: Provided training and capacity building to 46 civil society organizations on civil society’s role in peacebuilding, 42 civil society organizations on the legal framework and applicable legislation governing NGO work, and with leaders from local organizations on leading effective advocacy campaigns.</p> <p>Community Dialogue: Facilitated 18 dialogues and roundtables to date on issue identification, effective communications, conflict analysis, and negotiations and mediation for local communities.</p>

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Supporting Livelihoods in Syria (wheat and livestock program) Seeks to address critical quality wheat seed shortages and input gaps, and to make farmers, agro-service providers, and cooperatives more resilient to price and market shocks.</p>	<p>Wheat Seed Program: Completed the provision and planting of 1,750 metric tons of locally-sourced high-quality, certified and registered wheat seed with 4,700 farmers in Amouda, Hasakah, and Dayr az-Zawr.</p> <p>Good Agricultural Practices for Wheat Seed Farmers: Provided extension services to wheat farmers in Amouda, Hasakah, and Dayr az-Zawr.</p> <p>Support for Livestock Veterinary Service Providers: Provided in-kind support (equipment, vaccines, and medicines) to 8 selected veterinary service providers (24 total to date) who will reach an estimated 120,000 adult sheep belonging to small to medium size livestock herders.</p>
<p>Syria Livelihoods Project</p>	<p>Career Opportunities: Placed 250 job seekers with disabilities in vacant positions; 93 have completed their six-month, part-paid internships and are now permanently employed. Provided training to a local NGO on entrepreneurship and business plan development to 316 beneficiaries.</p> <p>Case Management: Worked with local authorities to support to more than 18,000 persons with disabilities. Launched a case management system that registers, assesses and refers persons with disabilities, channeling individuals to support services that meet their economic, health and social assistance needs both within SANES and to external specialist service providers. As of the quarter, the program has registered 2,671 beneficiaries with disabilities and referred 126 to requested service providers.</p> <p>Career Guidance: Delivered employment readiness sessions and career guidance to 1,996 persons with disabilities through a local disabled persons organization. The beneficiaries can also receive financial support for their businesses, job placements, or referrals to other specialist service providers.</p>
<p>Economic Management for Stability in Northeast Syria</p>	<p>Private Sector Engagement: Continued to provide technical assistance to 75 enterprises with over 1,500 sustainable job opportunities, a third of which are held by women. Two thirds of the partnerships were in the agro-processing and food production sectors.</p> <p>Agricultural Markets and Food Security: Partnered with farmers and livestock producers to increase producer revenue, enhance sustainability, leverage market mechanisms, raise outputs, improve product availability, and reduce import requirements. Increased vegetable production in the Amouda area, expanded cold storage logistics and facilities; and improved the productivity and quality of animal feed compounders and poultry producers.</p> <p>Climate-smart Agriculture Technology: Provided, trained, and equipped agro-service providers to provide farmers with laser leveling, a low-cost precision agriculture technology that delivers climate-smart benefits by grading land to be completely flat.</p> <p>Access to Finance: Initiated plans to establish a microfinance initiative to bring new rural dwellers into the agricultural sector in Hasakah. Prepared dossiers to enable small loans of up to 1,000 USD to purchase equipment and inputs.</p> <p>Macro-Fiscal/Financial Reform: Re-engaged with SANES to build upon core policy dialogue and related macro-structural reforms. Work focuses on achieving further progress on promoting key investment climate and economic policy and transparency reforms designed to support economic reactivation and sustainable poverty-reducing growth.</p>

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Essential Services, Good Governance, and Economic Recovery Seeks to foster resilience and stability in Syria by implementing activities to restore essential services, strengthen inclusive, participatory, accountable, and transparent governance, and revive livelihoods and local economies in the agriculture sector.</p>	<p>COVID-19 Vaccination Awareness: Trained and equipped health committees and health education offices to improve their public-facing communication about COVID-19 vaccine safety and conduct an educational campaign to combat misinformation and disinformation.</p> <p>Rehabilitation of agricultural complexes: Rehabilitated four agricultural complexes in Dayr az Zawr and their associated irrigation canal networks and connect the complexes to the electrical grid. Provided backup generators, replaced the irrigation pumps with all appropriate electrical and mechanical works, and cleaned and patched the irrigation canals that distribute water from the agricultural complexes to the nearby farms.</p> <p>Enhancing Water Delivery: Rehabilitated the Tabiah Water Station and the distribution pipeline that supplies drinking water to the residents and IDPs in the region.</p> <p>Enhancing Electricity Delivery: Rehabilitated the electrical network and transformation centers, including installation of new transformers, in Izbeh and Moazilieh.</p> <p>Strengthening the role of the Social Affairs and Labor Offices: Facilitated stakeholder engagement activities and coordination meetings to discuss the water and electricity service provision interventions, along with other IDP needs.</p> <p>Establishment of Oxygen Bottling Plants: Rehabilitated existing buildings in Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah and established medical-grade oxygen bottling facilities to address health facility oxygen demands to treat COVID-19 and other medical issues. The plant in Dayr az-Zawr will have a capacity of 100 cylinders per day, while the Raqqah plant will be the first in the governorate and have a capacity of 300 cylinders per day.</p>

Source: USAID Middle East Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/15/2023.

POLITICAL PROCESS

No Progress Made in UNSCR 2254 Political Process

State said that the only viable path to a lasting political solution to the conflict depends on Syrian President Assad’s constructive reengagement in the Syrian-led, UN-facilitated process consistent with UNSCR 2254.⁴⁵⁶

This quarter, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said he was concerned that the Constitutional Committee had not met for 9 months and noted that this sends a “troubling message that Syrians’ ability to search for a comprehensive solution is held hostage to issues unrelated to their country.”⁴⁵⁷ State said the United States continued to support UNSCR 2254 and efforts to advance a political resolution to the crisis, including through the convening of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva.⁴⁵⁸

Lack of progress in the Syrian political process has contributed to distrust and a lack of support for the current efforts of the Constitutional Committee, State said.⁴⁵⁹ The regime’s refusal to participate in these meetings during the last 9 months (after attending the previous nine rounds of meetings “in bad faith”) remains the main obstacle to achieving progress towards a political solution.⁴⁶⁰ The regime “should cooperate with the political process and empower its delegates to negotiate in good faith for the Syrian people,” State said.⁴⁶¹

According to State, the U.S. Government “will not normalize relations with the Assad regime” nor lift sanctions until there is real, enduring progress toward a political solution, and urged “anyone engaging with Damascus to consider—sincerely and thoroughly—how their engagement” could help Syrians in need.⁴⁶²

Although some Arab countries have engaged with the regime since the February earthquakes, only Tunisia has upgraded its ties with Damascus.⁴⁶³

Calls to readmit Syria in the Arab League are growing in the region, although there is “still no consensus—a necessary requirement to fully reinstate Assad’s membership—among Arab League members,” State said.⁴⁶⁴

After 12 years of “brutal war on the Syrian people” the Assad regime has taken no steps towards a political solution, according to State, and continues to “cast blame on others for the war it started and has maintained.”⁴⁶⁵ The regime continues the behavior that “caused the international community to recoil in horror and reject any dealings with Assad,” State said.⁴⁶⁶

Despite the stalemate, State said it “remains positioned to respond to policy needs and support political process stakeholders to engage in any discussions or potential meetings next quarter.”⁴⁶⁷ This includes workshops and dialogue sessions to help bridge the gap between local community-based organizations and their local constituents by facilitating initiatives to ensure political inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and outreach.⁴⁶⁸

After 12 years of “brutal war on the Syrian people” the Assad regime has taken no steps towards a political solution, according to State, and continues to “cast blame on others for the war it started and has maintained.”

TSO Groups Continue to be Implicated in Killings, Abuses

This quarter, media reported that Turkish-supported opposition (TSO) groups continued to commit human rights abuses—including killings, torture, unjust detention, and kidnapping for ransom.⁴⁶⁹

TSO groups have a well-documented history of committing abuses against members of Kurdish and Yezidi groups, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance of civilians, sexual violence, looting, seizure of private property, and the transfer of detained civilians across the border into Türkiye, according to State’s most recent Country Reports on Human Rights practices, released during the quarter.⁴⁷⁰ The report described continued NGO assessments that some TSO confiscations of private property and other abuses were “part of a systematic effort to enforce demographic change.”⁴⁷¹ The report also referenced the UN Commission of Inquiry’s and other human rights organizations’ reporting on the frequent presence Turkish officials in Syrian National Army (SNA) detention facilities, including in interrogation sessions where torture was used, and that the justice system and detention network used by SNA forces reportedly featured “judges” appointed by Turkey and paid in Turkish lira, suggesting “SNA detention operations acted under the effective command of Turkish forces.”⁴⁷²

In January, the Suleiman Shah Brigade, an SNA-affiliated TSO, seized civilians’ property near Afrin in northwestern Syria and refused to return the property to the owners, according to local media.⁴⁷³

In March a war monitor reported that members of the Jaish al-Sharqiya faction “brutally beat” an Afrin civilian after he prevented Jaish al-Sharqiya affiliated shepherds from herding sheep in his relatives’ fields.⁴⁷⁴ Members of al-Sham Legion beat an elderly man and “unjustly arrested” a citizen after he filmed faction members seizing his land, according to local media.⁴⁷⁵ On March 19, the SNA faction Ahrar al-Sharqiya reportedly killed four Kurdish civilians at a Nowruz (New Year) celebration, resulting in mass protests.⁴⁷⁶ In response, the Syrian Democratic Council, the political arm of the SDF, called for a demilitarized, humanitarian zone in Afrin and the expulsion of TSOs from the area.⁴⁷⁷

According to local media, on March 21 the Military Police announced the arrest of three individuals allegedly involved in the killing of the four Kurdish civilians, State said.⁴⁷⁸ The Syrian Interim Government “condemned the murders and vowed to investigate the crime,” according to cable reporting. In a March 20 tweet, Ahrar al-Sharqiya leader Aboou Hatim Sharqiya denied the accusations.⁴⁷⁹

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Approximately 15.3 million Syrians—more than two thirds of the country’s population—need humanitarian assistance, according to OCHA’s 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, an overall increase of 700,000 people compared to the previous year.⁴⁸⁰ OCHA noted that 12.1 million people are estimated to be food insecure, an increase of 100,000 people compared to 2022.⁴⁸¹

As in previous quarters, the economic situation in northeastern Syria continued to be difficult with high commodity price fluctuations, the continued devaluation of the Syrian pound, reduced agriculture yield due to drought conditions, and the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes in northwestern Syria.⁴⁸² The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting global food and fertilizer supply crisis also continued to impact northeastern Syria’s economy and food security.⁴⁸³ These economic challenges increased the need for stabilization and humanitarian assistance funding in Syria over the past 2 years, State said.⁴⁸⁴ (See Table 10.)

Table 10.

U.S. Humanitarian Funding for the Syria Regional Crisis Response in FY 2022

Agency	
USAID BHA	\$980,226,455
State PRM	\$833,252,423
TOTAL	\$1,813,478,878

Note: Funds committed or obligated in FY 2022. These figures reflect publicly announced funding as of September 30, 2022.

Source: USAID, “Syria Complex Emergency Humanitarian Update #763,” 3/17/2023.

EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

On February 6, southeastern Türkiye and northwestern Syria experienced two devastating earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.8 and 7.6. Aftershocks continued in the ensuing days and weeks.⁴⁸⁵ Approximately 86,000 people in Syria were displaced, including nearly 54,000 who lived in 77 displacement sites.⁴⁸⁶ More than 7,000 died in Syria as a result of the earthquake, many others were injured, and the entire region continues to suffer from damage or destroyed homes and critical infrastructure.⁴⁸⁷ According to the World Bank, the earthquakes caused an estimated \$5.1 billion in direct physical damages in Syria and impacted 4 governorates that are home to approximately 10 million people.⁴⁸⁸

White Helmets volunteers help search and rescue teams in response to the Feb. 6 earthquake. (Syria Civil Defense photo)



USAID-funded White Helmets Respond to Earthquakes

More than 3,000 volunteers and administrative officers with the White Helmets—a humanitarian organization that provides assistance in response to attacks, including search and rescue, in Syria—participated in earthquake response operations. The White Helmets used 70 rented heavy vehicles and 250 heavy vehicles provided by civilians and civilian organizations.⁴⁸⁹ The White Helmets supported more than 500 ambulance operations, 31 firefighting operations, and 212 service operations that included the demolition of damaged walls, removal of rubble, and transportation of remains that could not be reached by residents.⁴⁹⁰

The White Helmets faced several challenges in responding to the earthquake, according to USAID. They did not have enough international search and rescue teams or sufficient access to specialized search and rescue equipment.⁴⁹¹ Instead, the White Helmets used their bare hands and minimal equipment to search for people trapped under rubble.⁴⁹² The earthquake damage was spread over a large area, requiring greater manpower and equipment than the White Helmets' existing capacity.⁴⁹³ Destruction of infrastructure, including hospitals, and the lack of doctors and nurses made it more difficult to care for the injured.⁴⁹⁴ Limited fuel reserves constrained the response: consumption of fuel by the White Helmets increased from an average of 4,000 liters per day to 70,000 liters per day during the first 3 days of the response, depleting resources normally used for other health clinic and ambulance operations.⁴⁹⁵ Power outages and loss of internet access disrupted communications, bank closures limited access to cash, rescue paths were blocked by large amounts of rubble, temperatures were near freezing, and many buildings were at risk of collapse.⁴⁹⁶

USAID provided an additional \$7 million to the White Helmets to cover core operational costs, provide emergency health care to women and children, maintain ambulance services, support women's health centers, and strengthen community resilience.⁴⁹⁷ USAID said that it plans to deliver an additional \$2 million to the White Helmets to support community resilience efforts.⁴⁹⁸ In March, Qatar agreed to provide an additional \$1.9 million to USAID to support the White Helmets' community resilience activities.⁴⁹⁹

Earthquakes Impact U.S.-funded Assistance

The earthquakes' impact on U.S. military and stabilization operations was limited, as those activities occur in northeastern Syria, which was “not as severely impacted” as northwestern Syria and Türkiye, State said.⁵⁰⁰ State reported that some U.S.-funded stabilization activities in Raqqah, Tabqa, Dayr az Zawr, Hasakah, and Manbij paused for a short time to ensure the safety and well being of staff and beneficiaries. However, stabilization assistance projects continued to provide critical support such as fire fighter first response in northeastern Syria, media coverage of the earthquake and emergency response, and psychosocial support, State reported.⁵⁰¹

USAID-funded stabilization operations in northwestern Syria experienced a more direct impact. USAID MEB reported that its implementers' staff were killed or lost family members, and many other staff were displaced.⁵⁰² Gaziantep-based staff from a USAID implementer worked remotely from other cities in Türkiye where they are sheltering with family and friends.⁵⁰³ Many staff feared for the safety of their homes in the immediate days after the earthquakes, with some staff spending the nights in their vehicles or on office space floors, though some implementers' office space was destroyed.⁵⁰⁴ Many USAID implementers paused their activities for a couple of weeks to allow staff to grieve for lost family members and to find temporary shelter if displaced.⁵⁰⁵

Northwestern Syria's economy is wholly reliant upon Türkiye. As a result, the impact of the earthquake on markets and the availability of key commodities, such as fuel and construction materials, severely hampered recovery efforts and the ability of USAID

Urban Search and Rescue personnel from Fairfax County, Virginia prepare to mobilize in response to the Feb. 6 earthquake. (U.S. Air Force photo)



implementers to respond in both northwestern and northeastern Syria.⁵⁰⁶ The earthquakes will likely have lasting impacts on the cost of operations and on supply chains for USAID implementers and operations.⁵⁰⁷

U.S. Government Announces \$235 Million for Earthquake Assistance

During the quarter, the United States announced \$235 million in humanitarian assistance to respond to the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria.⁵⁰⁸ This humanitarian assistance will target “vulnerable earthquake-affected populations in Türkiye and Syria” and be available to support international and nongovernmental organizations providing assistance.⁵⁰⁹ This funding is in addition to ongoing funding for the Syria crisis, and will not diminish ongoing programs, State said.⁵¹⁰

USAID and State Pivot Existing Programs to Support Earthquake Response

According to State, several organizations working in earthquake-affected areas, including U.S. Government partners, pivoted their activities to focus on the earthquake response.⁵¹¹ The U.S. Government and international donors worked to support their current Syrian civil society partners as they made the shift.⁵¹²

Following the earthquake, USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team and activated a Washington, D.C.-based Response Management Team to coordinate U.S. government humanitarian response efforts in both Türkiye and Syria.⁵¹³ On February 9, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control issued a temporary general license for a period of 180 days to expand authorization under the Syrian Sanctions Regulations to support emergency earthquake relief efforts in Syria.⁵¹⁴ USAID demobilized the Disaster Assistance Response Team and Response Management Team for both Türkiye and Syria on March 24.⁵¹⁵

USAID BHA and State PRM implementers immediately adapted existing humanitarian programs and mobilized personnel to conduct rapid needs assessments.⁵¹⁶ USAID-funded UNICEF conducted rapid assessments of water, sanitation, and hygiene needs at temporary shelters and provided water trucking to an estimated 60,000 people in Aleppo, Hamah, Tartus, and Latakia governorates.⁵¹⁷ UNICEF also deployed mobile health and nutrition teams to Aleppo, Hamah, Latakia, Idlib, and Tartus governorates.⁵¹⁸ USAID implementers also supported emergency health needs in nine hospitals, providing psychological first aid, supplying local health facilities with medical commodities, and supporting the operation of six mobile clinics for IDPs.⁵¹⁹ A State PRM implementer also provided medical supplies to hospitals in earthquake-affected areas.⁵²⁰

USAID reported that its implementers also removed rubble, provided relief commodity kits, kitchen sets, and hygiene items to thousands of newly displaced persons.⁵²¹ USAID provided

Table 11.

U.S. Humanitarian Funding for the Syria Earthquake Response in FY 2023

Agency	Syria	Türkiye
USAID BHA	\$73,518,000	\$55,772,280
State PRM	\$22,900,000	\$52,100,000
DoD	\$4,475,623	\$23,125,113
TOTAL	\$100,893,623	\$130,997,393

Source: USAID, “Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes, Fact Sheet #13,” 3/24/2023.

USAID reported that its implementers also removed rubble, provided relief commodity kits, kitchen sets, and hygiene items to thousands of newly displaced persons.

fuel and heaters for people in shelters, thousands of liters of fuel to Syrian medical facilities, and supported search and rescue teams, medical consultations and treatments for tens of thousands of people, and ready to eat meals for thousands of individuals.⁵²² USAID also supported an implementer that provided cash assistance to thousands of families in Afrin and Azaz to purchase food and other essential items.⁵²³ A State PRM implementer also provided over 30,000 relief commodity kits and supported more than 30,000 families with winter clothing.⁵²⁴

HEALTH

Earthquakes Significantly Impacted Response to Cholera Outbreak

As of March 4, over 100,000 suspected cholera cases had been reported in all 14 governorates in Syria, resulting in at least 104 deaths, according to OCHA.⁵²⁵ Although infectious disease surveillance systems and laboratory capacity across the earthquake-affected areas had been fully restored by the end of the quarter, the risk of waterborne diseases, including cholera, remained high due to over-crowding, damaged water and sanitation infrastructure, and damage and disruption to cholera treatment infrastructure.⁵²⁶ OCHA noted that thousands of people remained in over-crowded shelters, with many lacking adequate access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene.⁵²⁷

USAID BHA said that its implementers shifted existing funds and programs and pivoted cholera-related activities to fill gaps in health and water, sanitation, and hygiene services.⁵²⁸ During the quarter, USAID BHA implementers surveilled and reported localized outbreaks of cholera, and collected samples of suspected outbreaks for testing labs.⁵²⁹ USAID BHA implementers also conducted an oral cholera vaccination campaign, and provided hygiene kits, hygiene promotion activities, and household water tanks.⁵³⁰ For IDPs, USAID BHA implementers provided water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance through water trucking services, the main source of water for households in camps.⁵³¹ Implementers also provided support for solid waste management activities, desludging activities, and latrine cleaning services in camps.⁵³²

USAID BHA reported that its implementers many of its activities were delayed in earthquake affected areas and that reporting of cholera cases was disrupted, which has led to an unclear overall picture of the outbreak.⁵³³





A Syrian mother of seven children pulls weeds from her wheat fields. In 2022, the USAID Supporting Livelihoods in Syria program helped 4,267 Dayr az Zawr farmers plant locally-sourced, high-quality wheat. (USAID photo)

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WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

OVERVIEW

State and three other Federal government departments conduct activities to degrade ISIS capabilities in Iraq and Syria as part of a whole-of-government effort to reduce ISIS manpower and disrupt its financing. Efforts include the following:

Prosecutions of ISIS-related individuals. The Department of Justice (DoJ) prosecutes foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS, as well as those accused of assisting ISIS, obstructing investigations, or otherwise affiliated with ISIS. Since 2014, the DoJ has charged more than 230 individuals with international terrorism related conduct relating to ISIS. Over that same period, the DoJ has obtained more than 185 convictions; the remaining cases are in various stages of litigation. These numbers include individuals who could be described as foreign terrorist fighters or homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS, as well as those who may have assisted their conduct, obstructed investigations, or otherwise involved an identified link to ISIS.⁵³⁴

Disruption of ISIS financing. The Department of the Treasury (Treasury) and State's Bureau of Counterterrorism target ISIS financial activities to disrupt the group's ability to fund operations. DoJ and Treasury Attachés at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad contributed to a 2-year \$5.3 million effort funded by State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs to enable the United Nations Development Programme to expand efforts to identify, disrupt, and dismantle ISIS money-laundering and other illicit ISIS financing activities.⁵³⁵

Aiding the repatriation process. The DoJ, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), supports U.S.-led efforts to repatriate ISIS-affiliated individuals, including women and children, held in detention centers in Syria to their countries of origin. As part of this effort, the DoJ collects biometric information from detained individuals prior to their departure to their home countries. Although the FBI does not assist in detention operations in Syria, the FBI works with its Syrian partners to monitor the movement of prisoners of interest. Additionally, the DoJ Justice Attaché participates in working groups focused on detention, repatriation, and rehabilitation of Iraqi ISIS fighters both in Syria and returned from Syria to Iraq and assists in gathering data on pre-trial ISIS detainees, including women and children; data concerning length of case investigation and adjudication; and data on post-conviction developments of ISIS prisoners in Iraq.⁵³⁶

Designation of ISIS-linked terrorists and terrorist organizations. Both Treasury and State designate specific individuals or groups as Specially Designated Global Terrorists and State designates specific groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.⁵³⁷ Since 2014, the Secretary of the Treasury has designated 130 individuals and entities providing support to ISIS pursuant to Executive Order 13224. During the same time period, the Secretary of State designated 19 ISIS branches and affiliates and more than 50 ISIS leaders and members as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under Executive Order 13224, and 9 of those ISIS branches and affiliates as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.⁵³⁸

Strengthening of evidence in support of warrants and prosecutions. The DoJ's Justice Attaché works with Iraqi security and legal partners, including the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (CTS) and the investigative judge assigned to the CTS to improve electronic surveillance and forensic laboratory capabilities in support of warrants and prosecutions. Additionally, the DoJ National Security Division Attaché reviews intelligence and other available information to determine if criminal prosecutions can be brought against suspected foreign terrorist fighters and other terrorists; assists in assembling available information for use by international partners in foreign investigations and prosecutions; and assists in navigating complex legal issues associated with the use of intelligence in criminal investigations and court proceedings, and issues related to the admissibility of evidence.⁵³⁹

Mitigating the threat to the United States homeland. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) works to reduce threats to the homeland posed by ISIS-linked individuals attempting to enter the United States to conduct attacks. Efforts include obtaining biometric and biographic information of detained ISIS foreign terrorist fighters, among other efforts.⁵⁴⁰

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

The DoJ reported that its Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad worked closely with the Coalition's UN partners as well as Iraqi law enforcement, counterterrorism, and judiciary officials to continue to develop strong law enforcement and domestic intelligence to counter ISIS operations.⁵⁴¹

During the quarter, the Justice Attaché arranged and participated in multiple meetings with Coalition personnel and Iraqi judges to ensure Iraqi arrest warrants are issued efficiently.⁵⁴² The Justice Attaché worked with Coalition legal advisors regarding the divestment of biometric information systems technology and support to Iraqi counterterrorism partners.⁵⁴³

The Justice Attaché provided guidance to the United Nations Development Programme's chief technical advisor to refine milestones for a State Bureau of International Law Enforcement and Narcotics Affairs-funded project to increase the quality and quantity of suspicious transaction reports to support law enforcement counterterrorism financing and anti-money laundering capacity building.⁵⁴⁴

Additionally, the DoJ's Office of International Affairs assisted partner nations in developing institutions and best practices needed for effective mutual legal assistance and extradition cooperation. Through office's Global Central Authorities Initiative and in coordination with the State, DoJ experts work with international counterparts, particularly throughout Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, to help partner countries build effective central authorities. These institutions support effective international cooperation in criminal matters and enable the legal processes necessary to bring terrorists and other criminals to justice under the rule of law.⁵⁴⁵

The DoJ's National Security Division continued to provide an in-country attorney to support a range of matters related to prosecuting foreign terrorist fighters and other terrorists, including efforts to counter the financing of terrorism.⁵⁴⁶ This includes reviewing intelligence and available information to determine if criminal prosecutions can be brought

against suspected foreign terrorist fighters, including those being detained in Syria by partner forces, in either U.S. or foreign courts.⁵⁴⁷

For an overview of convictions against ISIS-linked individuals and entities during the quarter, see Table 12.

The DoJ reported that no individuals were transferred to the United States from Iraq or Syria to face terrorism charges during the quarter. A total of 3 individuals from Iraq and 11 individuals from Syria have been transferred to the United States to face terrorism charges since 2014.⁵⁴⁸

Table 12.

Department of Justice Prosecutions and Activities against Terrorism

Date and Jurisdiction	Description
1/12/2023 District of Connecticut	Kevin Iman McCormick pled guilty to attempting to provide material support to ISIS. In 2019, McCormick made several statements to others expressing a desire to travel to Syria and to fight for ISIS, purchased tickets to Jamaica and Canada in attempts to get to Syria, and made a video recording pledging allegiance to ISIS's then-leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.
1/26/2023 Southern District of New York	Sayfullo Saipov was convicted of 28 counts of murder, attempted murder, and assault with a dangerous weapon, among other charges after he drove a truck onto a bike path in lower Manhattan, killing 8 people.
1/31/2023 Eastern District of Michigan	Ibraheem Izzy Musabli was convicted on charges of providing, attempting to provide, and conspiring to provide material support to ISIS in connection with his support for ISIS in Syria from 2015–2018.
2/1/2023 Southern District of Ohio	Naser Almadaoji was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 15 years of supervised release after pleading guilty in November 2021 to attempting to provide material support—himself, as personnel—to foreign terrorist organizations, namely ISIS and ISIS-K. According to court documents, Almadaoji intended to travel to Afghanistan to join ISIS-K and travelled to Egypt and Jordan to attempt to join ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula.
2/2/2023 and 2/3/2023 Southern District of New York	James Bradley (a/k/a “Abdullah”) and Arwa Muthana were sentenced to 11 and 9 years in prison, respectively, for attempting to provide material support to ISIS. According to court records, Bradley and Muthana attempted to travel to the Middle East to join and fight for ISIS.
2/8/2023 Eastern District of New York	Ruslan Maratovich Asainov was convicted of five counts of conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS, receiving military training from ISIS, fighting for ISIS in Syria, and other crimes involving training and providing expert advice to ISIS from 2013 to 2019.
2/24/2023 Middle District of Florida	Muhammad Momtaz Al-Azhari pled guilty to attempting to provide material support or resources to ISIS.

Source: DoJ OIG, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.2 WOG DOJ 01B, 4/4/2023.

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Treasury works with interagency and Coalition partners, including the Iraqi government, to identify ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders, disrupt its financial facilitation networks in Iraq and Syria, and designate ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in Iraq, Syria, Türkiye, and elsewhere. Treasury uses the full range of its authorities, including as co-lead of the Coalition's Counter ISIS Finance Group, to aggressively target ISIS leaders, operatives, financiers, and associated organizations around the world. These efforts have resulted in Treasury designating 136 ISIS-associated individuals and entities since 2014.⁵⁴⁹ Treasury reported that no sanctioned individuals or entities were removed from the sanctions list during the quarter.⁵⁵⁰

On January 5, 2023, Treasury sanctioned a network of four Türkiye-based individuals and two related companies that were part of an ISIS financial facilitation network, pursuant to Executive Order 13224, as amended.⁵⁵¹

Abd Al Hamid Salim Ibrahim Brukan al-Khatuni was sanctioned for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of ISIS. An Iraqi national, al-Khatuni engaged in financial facilitation and recruitment activities for ISIS while living illegally in Türkiye, receiving millions of dollars from ISIS, managing hawala offices, and sending funds to at least one ISIS cell member arrested by the Kurdistan Regional Government's Counterterrorism Directorate in March 2021.⁵⁵²

Sham Express, a Türkiye-based company founded by Brukan al-Khatuni in 2020, was sanctioned for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, ISIS. Sham Express worked with a former ISIS finance leader, AbdalRahman Ali al-Ahmad al-Rawi, who established financial channels throughout Russia, Europe, China, and Africa to transfer existing ISIS funds and generate additional ISIS revenue. ISIS financial facilitators also used Sham Express to support the smuggling of gold from Syria and Sudan via Iraq, Egypt, and Libya to generate additional revenue for ISIS.⁵⁵³

Wadi Alrrafidayn for Foodstuffs, a business in Mersin, Türkiye, sanctioned for being owned, controlled, or directed by, directly or indirectly, Brukan al-Khatuni. Brukan al-Khatuni and his sons all worked at a money service business that Brukan al-Khatuni later rebranded as Wadi Alrrafidayn.⁵⁵⁴

Muhammad Abd Al Hamid Salim Brukan al-Khatuni was sanctioned for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, ISIS. He is one of Brukan al-Khatuni's sons who coordinated with an ISIS finance official to facilitate the transfer of more than \$500,000 in June 2021.⁵⁵⁵

Umar Abd Al Hamid Salim Brukan al-Khatuni was sanctioned for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, ISIS. He is one of Brukan al-Khatuni's sons who coordinated with an ISIS finance official to facilitate the transfer of more than \$500,000 in June 2021.⁵⁵⁶

Lu'ay Jasim Hammadi al-Juburi was sanctioned for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of ISIS. He used Sham Express to transfer money on behalf of ISIS between Türkiye, Syria, and Iraq. Lu'ay Jasim, previously an al-Qaeda member since 2008, joined ISIS in 2014. He worked in ISIS's financial administration for several years until he moved to Mersin, Türkiye, where he managed a business used by ISIS members in Türkiye to illegally transfer funds throughout the region, notably Iraq and Egypt.⁵⁵⁷

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

This quarter, the Secretary of State did not make any Foreign Terrorist Organization or Specially Designated Global Terrorist designation related to OIR.⁵⁵⁸

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

DHS worked with interagency partners, including from the Intelligence Community and the DoD, to identify, analyze, and mitigate the threat posed by ISIS and ISIS affiliates and associates traveling to the United States to potentially conduct attacks. Additionally, DHS continued to work with interagency partners to collect the biometric and biographic information of detained ISIS foreign terrorist fighters to support DHS's screening and vetting efforts. These joint efforts work to ensure that relevant classified and unclassified information was available to support vetting and screening operations to identify individuals who may pose a threat to its security, when attempting to travel to the United States. DHS's ability to screen and vet a myriad of evolving threats critically depends on intelligence and information from other Departments and Agencies, including the DoD. These sources of information are impacted by shifts in national security priorities.⁵⁵⁹

DHS reported that through its participation on the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, DHS continued to support investigations surrounding foreign terrorists and organizations that move money, weapons, and people across international borders to conduct their operations. DHS's Homeland Security Investigations unit worked with Joint Terrorism Task Force partners, including the DoD and other government agencies, to identify subjects who are known associates of ISIS networks within the United States, identify threats, and provide options for disrupting those threats to DHS Special Agents in the field.⁵⁶⁰

Additionally, DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis continued to monitor for threats from foreign terrorist organizations and homegrown violent extremists attempting to inspire potential followers to conduct attacks in the United States. DHS reported that it remains concerned that foreign terrorist organizations or their affiliates still aspire to conduct attacks in the United States, noting that foreign terrorists maintain a highly visible presence online seeking to inspire attacks in the United States and against U.S. allies. DHS reported that I&A shares information and strategic intelligence on these threats and broader trends and activities.







A U.S. Air Force loadmaster pushes cargo on a C-17 Globemaster III at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. (U.S. Air Force photo)

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OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies' strategic planning efforts; completed, ongoing, and planned oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; investigations; and hotline activities from January 1 through March 31, 2023.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. This effort includes reviewing and analyzing completed oversight, management, and other relevant reports to identify systemic problems, trends, lessons learned, and best practices to inform future oversight projects. The Lead IG agencies issue an annual joint strategic oversight plan for each operation.

FY 2023 JOINT STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT PLAN ACTIVITIES

In 2014, upon designation of the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the three Lead IG agencies developed and implemented a joint strategic oversight plan for comprehensive oversight of OIR. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2023 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR* was published on October 3, 2022, as part of the *FY 2023 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*. The *FY 2023 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR* is organized by three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations and Security Cooperation; 2) Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance; and 3) Support to Mission.

The Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group serves as a primary venue to coordinate audits, inspections, and evaluations of U.S. Government-funded activities supporting overseas contingency operations, including those relating to the Middle East. The Joint Planning Group meets quarterly to provide a forum for coordination of the broader Federal oversight community, including the military service IGs and audit agencies, the Government Accountability Office, and the OIGs of the Departments of Justice, the Treasury, Energy, and Homeland Security, and of the Intelligence Community.

In February 2023, the Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group held its 61st meeting.



**FY 2023
Comprehensive
Oversight Plan
for Overseas
Contingency
Operations.**

Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Military Operations and Security Cooperation focuses on determining the degree to which the contingency operation is accomplishing its security mission. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Conducting unilateral and partnered counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations
- Providing security assistance
- Training and equipping partner security forces
- Advising, assisting, and enabling partner security forces
- Advising and assisting ministry-level security officials

DIPLOMACY, GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance focuses on countering some of the root causes of violent extremism. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Countering and reducing corruption, social inequality, and extremism
- Promoting inclusive and effective democracy, civil participation, and empowerment of women
- Promoting reconciliation, peaceful conflict resolution, demobilization and reintegration of armed forces, and other rule-of-law efforts
- Providing emergency relief, assistance, and protection to displaced persons, refugees, and others affected by crisis
- Building or enhancing host-nation governance capacity
- Supporting sustainable and appropriate recovery and reconstruction activities, repairing infrastructure, removing explosive remnants of war, and reestablishing utilities and other public services
- Countering trafficking in persons and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse

SUPPORT TO MISSION

Support to Mission focuses on U.S. administrative, logistical, and management efforts that enable military operations and non-military programs. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Ensuring the security of U.S. personnel and property
- Providing for the occupational health and safety of personnel
- Administering U.S. Government programs
- Managing U.S. Government grants and contracts
- Inventorying and accounting for equipment

AUDIT, INSPECTION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Lead IG agencies use dedicated, rotational, and temporary employees, as well as contractors, to conduct oversight projects, investigate fraud and corruption, and provide consolidated planning and reporting on the status of overseas contingency operations.

DoD OIG oversight and investigative staff maintained their presence in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain during the quarter. State OIG staff in Baghdad and Frankfurt conducted oversight work of the Department of State's activities in Iraq and Syria. USAID OIG staff provided oversight of USAID activities in Syria and Iraq from their regional office in Frankfurt, supported by additional staff in Washington, D.C.

The DoD OIG and Army Audit Agency (AAA) completed two oversight reports related to OIR during the quarter, one on the DoD's handling of Service members who experienced a traumatic brain injury, and the other on the Army's management of prepositioned equipment, including equipment that supports OIR.

As of March 31, 2023, 13 projects related to OIR were ongoing. The OIGs had no planned projects related to OIR as of the end of the quarter.

FINAL REPORTS BY LEAD IG AGENCIES

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Evaluation of the DoD's Management of Traumatic Brain Injury

DODIG-2023-059; March 28, 2023

The DoD OIG conducted this evaluation to determine the extent to which the Defense Health Agency and Military Service medical departments implemented policies and procedures and provided oversight to ensure that Service members who experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI) were identified and screened to determine their appropriate level of care. In addition, the DoD OIG examined the extent to which the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) Service Components screened, identified, and documented signs and symptoms of TBIs.

TBIs are one of the most common injuries of troops wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq. The DoD OIG determined that the DoD did not consistently implement policies and procedures to determine the care needed for Service members with TBIs. Specifically, Military Health System (MHS) providers did not consistently identify and assess patients with TBIs; the DoD did not implement consistent processes for the management of TBI care; and the DoD did not implement consistent processes for the disposition of care, including return to duty status for patients diagnosed with a TBI.

The DoD OIG provided multiple recommendations; however the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the Director of the Defense Health Agency did not respond to the recommendations in the report. Therefore, the recommendations are unresolved. The DoD OIG requested that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the Director of the Defense Health Agency provide comments within 30 days of final report issuance.



Vehicles stored at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait (DoD photo)

FINAL REPORTS BY PARTNER AGENCIES

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Followup Audit of Army Prepositioned Stocks-5

A-2023-0030-AXZ; March 21, 2023

The U.S. Army Audit Agency (AAA) conducted this follow on audit to determine if Army commands implemented recommendations from a previous report that focused on Army Prepositioned Stocks (APS)-5 equipment used to support operational needs statements (ONS).

Specifically, the follow-up audit reviewed the status of recommendations 1, 2, 5, and 6 from AAA Report A-2020-0087-AXZ (APS-5 Issue and Return), dated September 28, 2020, and whether corrective actions mitigated the conditions identified in the report. The initial audit included fieldwork at U.S. Army Central and the 401st Army Field Support Brigade at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, which supports the OIR mission.

The AAA determined in the follow-up audit that the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff G-3/5/7 (ODCS G-3/5/7) and U.S. Army Materiel Command implemented Recommendations 1 and 5, which had to do with reconciling all APS-5 equipment issued to units in support of ONS, and establishing tracking numbers with each individual ONS and the associated issued equipment. U.S. Army Central didn't implement recommendation 6, which required the relevant command to conduct annual revalidation reviews, but the issue was overcome by events and no further actions were necessary. Lastly, ODCS G-3/5/7 only partially implemented recommendation 2, which dealt with streamlining the ONS validation and approval process. The office didn't include metrics for all subprocesses involved with ONS validations and approvals in updates to Army policy, which would help improve the processing and delivery time of equipment to units.

As a result, further efforts are required to ensure requesting units receive equipment in a timely way. The AAA made one recommendation in the follow-up audit, for the ODCS to streamline the ONS validation and approval process by requiring stakeholders at each level of the ONS process to refine subprocesses and develop metrics to improve processing and delivery time of critical equipment. The ODCS G-3/5/7 agreed with the recommendation and agreed to complete necessary processes by September 30, 2023.

ONGOING OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of March 31, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 13 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 8 describes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Table 13, contained in Appendix G, lists the titles and objectives for each of these projects. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Military Operations and Security Cooperation

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD properly stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, which includes OIR.

Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance

- **USAID OIG** plans to conduct an audit to determine whether USAID has adequately strengthened Iraqi business capacity through economic development activities.

Support to Mission

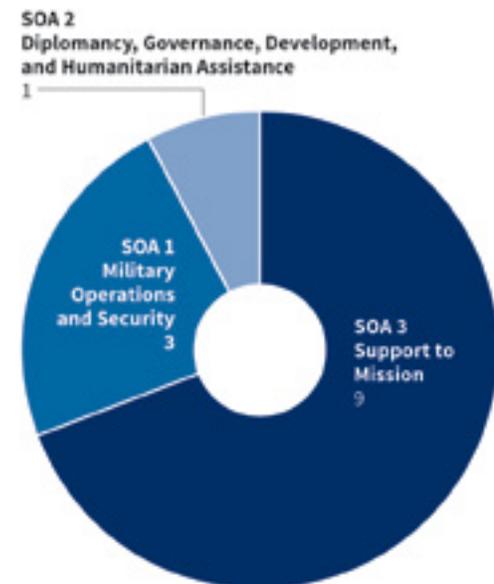
- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD is effectively monitoring sensitive equipment provided to the Iraqi government.
- **State OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Department of State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, construction, and commissioning of the central power plant at Embassy Baghdad.
- **State OIG** is evaluating the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil.
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has effectively implemented its New Partnerships Initiative, which includes support for religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that were victimized by ISIS.

PLANNED OVERSIGHT PROJECTS

As of March 31, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had no planned projects related to OIR. The Lead IG agencies will continue to plan for OIR-related oversight projects, which will be listed here in future quarterly reports.

Figure 8.

Ongoing Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

INVESTIGATIONS

The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OIR during the quarter. The DoD OIG’s criminal investigative component, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), maintained investigative personnel in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, where they worked on cases related to OIR. DCIS agents also worked on OIR-related cases from offices in the United States. State OIG and USAID OIG investigators worked on cases related to OIR from Washington, D.C., El Salvador, Germany, Israel, South Africa, and Thailand.

Investigative Activity Related To OIR

During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in one conviction based on an investigation into kickbacks and bribery allegations, which is discussed below.

During the quarter, the investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 25 investigations, initiated 7 investigations, and coordinated on 57 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations. As noted in Figure 9, the majority of primary offense locations and allegations related to OIR originated in Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

The Lead IG agencies and partners continued to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from DCIS, State OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

Figure 10 describes open investigations related to OIR and sources of allegations. During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 46 fraud awareness briefings for 284 participants.

Figure 9.

Types of Allegations and Primary Offense Locations, January 1–March 31, 2023

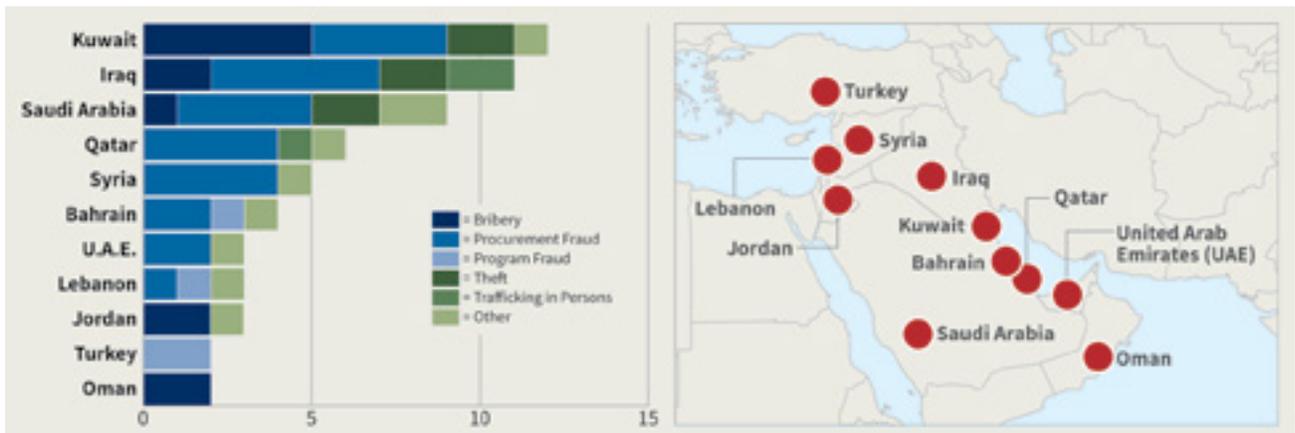
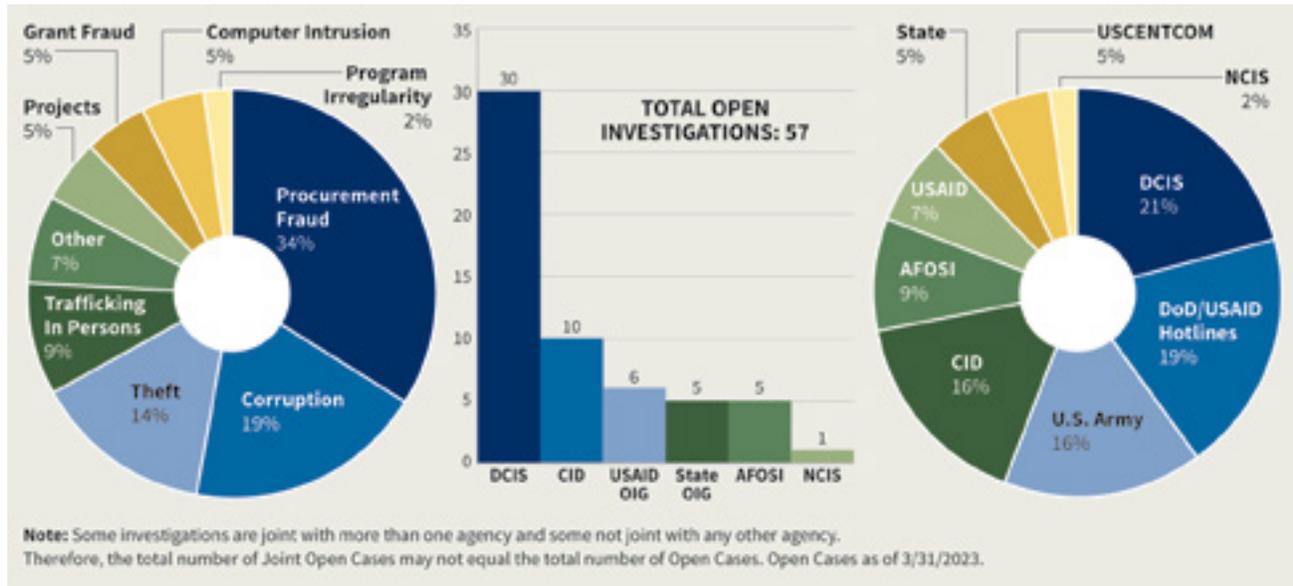


Figure 10.

Open Investigations and Sources of Allegations, January 1–March 31, 2023



Investigative Activity Related to Legacy Cases

DCIS has three ongoing “legacy” investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the formal designation of OIR.

HOTLINE

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority. A DoD OIG Hotline investigator coordinates among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate.

During the quarter, the DoD OIG Hotline investigator received 89 allegations and referred 78 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple subjects and allegations.

As noted in Figure 11, the majority of allegations during the reporting period related to personal misconduct, criminal allegations, and retaliation.

Figure 11.

Hotline Activities









A U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon flies a combat patrol mission in support of OIR.
(U.S. Air Force photo)

APPENDIXES

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APPENDIX A

Classified Appendix to this Report

A classified appendix to this report provides additional information on Operation Inherent Resolve, as noted in several sections of this report. The appendix will be delivered to relevant agencies and congressional committees.

APPENDIX B

About the Lead Inspector General

The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. Section 419, previously found at 5 U.S.C. App, Section 8L) established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. The primary Lead IG agencies are the Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Section 419 requires the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to appoint a Lead Inspector General from among the inspectors general of the primary Lead IG agencies upon the commencement or designation of a military operation that exceeds 60 days as an overseas contingency operation; or receipt of notification thereof.

Lead IG oversight of the operation “sunset” at the end of the first fiscal year after commencement or designation in which the total amount appropriated for the operation is less than \$100,000,000.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out the Lead IG statutory responsibilities to:

- Submit to Congress on a quarterly basis a report on the contingency operation and to make that report available to the public.
- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.

APPENDIX C

Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

This report covers the period from January 1 through March 31, 2023. The three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG—and partner oversight agencies contributed the content of this report.

To fulfill the congressional mandate to report on OIR, the Lead IG agencies gather data and information from Federal agencies and open sources. The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or from Federal agencies, and the information provided represents the view of the source cited in each instance.

INFORMATION COLLECTION FROM AGENCIES AND OPEN SOURCES

Each quarter, the Lead IG agencies gather information from the DoD, Department of State, USAID, and other Federal agencies about their programs and operations related to OIR. The Lead IG agencies use the information provided by their respective agencies for quarterly reporting and oversight planning.

This report also draws on current, publicly available information from reputable sources. Sources used in this report may include the following:

- U.S. Government statements, press conferences, and reports
- Reports issued by international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and think tanks
- Media reports

The Lead IG agencies use open-source information to assess information obtained through their agency information collection process and provide additional detail about the operation.

REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD IG, as the Lead IG for this operation, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies and then participate in editing the entire report. Once assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process of the report within its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask relevant offices within their agencies to comment, correct inaccuracies, and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review prior to publication. The final report reflects the editorial view of the DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.

APPENDIX D

Ongoing Oversight Projects

Table 13 lists the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 13.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of March 31, 2023

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Army's Management of Army Prepositioned Stock-5 Equipment

To determine whether the Army accurately maintained and accounted for Army Prepositioned Stock - 5 equipment, to include at facilities that support the OIR mission, in accordance with Federal and DoD policies.

Audit of Army Oversight of the Department of Defense Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II Contract

To determine whether the Army provided oversight of and appropriately staffed the DoD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II contract in the U.S. Central Command and OIR area of responsibility to ensure the contractors fulfilled requirements.

Audit of Tracking, Recovery, and Reuse of Department of Defense-Owned Shipping Containers

To determine to what extent the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps complied with DoD requirements to track, recover, and reuse shipping containers, including those at facilities that support OIR, and included those containers in an accountable property system of record.

Audit of Enhanced End-Use Monitoring of Sensitive Equipment Given to the Government of Iraq

To determine whether the DoD is conducting enhanced end-use monitoring for sensitive equipment provided to the Government of Iraq in accordance with the DoD Security Assistance Management Manual and the transfer agreement terms and conditions.

Evaluation of Combatant Command Military Deception Planning

To determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception (MILDEC) planning in support of ongoing OIR operations.

Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities in the U.S. Central Command

To determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

Evaluation of the Control and Accountability of DoD Biometric Data Collection Technologies

To determine the extent to which the DoD has ensured adequate control and accountability over technologies used to collect, store, and transmit biometric data to higher-level databases in overseas contingency operations.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Inspection of U.S. Embassy Beirut, Lebanon

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, to include U.S. Government assistance being provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This inspection will also produce a report with classified findings.

Audit of the Planning, Design, Construction, and Commissioning of the Power Plant at U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Iraq

To determine whether the Department of State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, construction, and commissioning of the central power plant at Embassy Baghdad.

Audit of Physical Security Standards for Department of State Temporary Structures at Selected Overseas Posts

To determine whether the Department of State managed the use of temporary structures at overseas posts in compliance with applicable physical security standards and procedures, including maintaining an accurate and complete inventory of temporary structures used for residential and office purposes.

Inspection of Embassy Baghdad and Consulate General Erbil, Iraq

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil. This inspection will also produce a report with classified findings.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL***Audit of USAID's New Partnerships Initiative***

To determine the extent to which USAID has established a framework for effectively implementing the New Partnerships Initiative as well as processes for measuring the initiative's performance and results, which has included support for religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that were victimized by ISIS.

Audit of USAID/Iraq's Economic Development Activities

To determine the extent to which USAID has generated employment among poor households and communities, strengthened economic capacity, and improved the Iraq business environment through economic development activities.



ACRONYMS

Acronym	
AAA	Army Audit Agency
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CID	U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Division
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
CTS	Counterterrorism Service
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DNGO	Department of Non-Governmental Organizations
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
EUM	end-use monitoring
EEUM	enhanced end-use monitoring
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FIIA	Federal Intelligence and Investigations Agency
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FY	fiscal year
IALO	Iraqi Air Liaison Officer
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
InSF	Internal Security Forces
IqAAC	Iraqi Army Aviation Command
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
ITAC	Iraqi Tactical Air Controller
ITC	Iraqi Intelligence Tactical Controller
JIOC	Joint Information Operations Center
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
JTAC	Joint Tactical Air Controller
KCL	Kurdistan Coordination Line
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party

Acronym	
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KSF	Kurdish Security Forces
Lead IG Agencies	The DoD, State, and USAID OIGs
Mol	Ministry of Interior
MoPA	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NMI	NATO Mission-Iraq
OC	operations command
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
ONS	operational needs statement
OSC-I	Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq
OUSD(P)	Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SANES	Self-Administration of North East Syria
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SFA	Syrian Free Army
SNA	Syrian National Army
State	Department of State
TBI	traumatic brain injury
TSO	Turkish-supported opposition
UAS	unmanned aerial system
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command
YPG	People's Protection Units

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Urban Search and Rescue members from Fairfax County, Virginia, are boarded onto a C-17 Globemaster III on Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, Feb. 7, 2023. (U.S. Air Force photo)

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